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# SUGAR IN THE AIR



SUGAR  
IN THE AIR

*A Romance*

by

E. C. LARGE



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# SUGAR IN THE AIR



## CHAPTER I

## SITUATIONS VACANT

THE last chestnut had fallen from the trees in the Hatch; the mushrooms were no longer to be had for the taking, in the early morning, from the dewy fields by the Antelope Inn. It was already late October, and Charles Pry, who lived in the old oast-house at Guff's Farm, had boarded himself up for the winter. In summer it did not matter that the floor was only hessian spread over laths — the old drying floor of the oast — or that the window had long since rotted away, leaving a hole through which the swallows flew. In winter it would be another story, and by six in the evening it was then already dark. So Pry had got from the farmer some pieces of frayed oilcloth which he nailed over the floor, and an ancient lattice window and some sacking, with which he made good the hole in the wall. With these improvements the old oast-house, having a sound roof and fourteen-inch walls, was comfortable enough. An oilstove kept it warm, and a stable lamp, swung from a beam, patterned its walls with warm shadows and mellow areas of light. The place was barely ten feet square, but it suited Pry: there was a plank, supported on two boxes, on which to do his cooking, and a bed, made of sacks filled with straw, which occupied a quarter of the floor. These, with a table, a seat made of the top of a piano stool

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stuck in a broken stove, and a box full of books and personal belongings, were all that Pry needed for what he happened to be doing.

He was trying to write a book, a treatise. Some eleven thin wads of manuscript, much bethumbed and the worse for wear, and headed with chapter numbers, indicated the progress he had made during the spring and summer. But Charles Pry was not a writer, he was an engineer, a fairly capable chemical engineer, who had served his apprenticeship, taken a degree in engineering and diploma in chemistry, and worked on some quite responsible jobs for his age, which was then twenty-nine. It was not of choice that Pry lived in a derelict oast-house, and tortured himself with trying to write a book, when it would have been so much easier for him to have installed machinery in chemical factories, and thereby earned money. It was simply that Charles Pry was unemployed; there were no jobs to be had, except on the manufacture of munitions, to which, for some reason, he could not bring himself to stoop. So he made the best of it; ekeing out the savings from his last job, which had ended some eighteen months before, and enjoying, for once in his life, a whole year round in the countryside. The book was only to occupy his mind. He did not know the names of half the things in the wild and colourful vegetation of the Chart, but his surroundings delighted him, and he had taken great pleasure in observing how the bees buzz round the willow trees, when they are in flower, in measuring the length of new wood that the firs put out each year, and in chatting to the farmer

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about the diet and life history of pigs. In his happier moods Pry found reasons for persuading himself that this spell of unemployment had been the best part of his life so far.

For one thing, his friend Abner Muller, who was habitually unemployed, in the sense that he never worked for gain and was therefore an experienced outcast from the economic life of society, came and lived near Pry. Abner read incessantly from the works of Walt Whitman, Nietzsche and D. H. Lawrence, and he appeared to Pry, for whom these writers' ideas had all the charm of new acquaintance, to be no less than what he said he was: a transvaluer of values. At any rate, Pry could talk with Muller and the conversation was not superficial; so far from regarding Pry's aspirations and anxieties as so much sob stuff, to be avoided as matter for conversation, and keeping as everyone else did to the safe repetition of formulae, commonplaces and mere sociable noise, Muller was interested only in what was to Pry a vague world of spirit and feeling, to which the pass-word was 'Experience'. This very nearly turned the world inside out for Mr. Pry, and profoundly disturbed his premature conclusion that the written or spoken word had just two uses, one for the record of facts and the laws of nature, and the other for working up such things as poetry, religion, politics and philosophy, which could be dismissed as so much 'talk' vaguely related to the emotionalism of women, which he affected to despise. When Muller quietly demonstrated that there are no 'Laws' in nature, that 'Facts' are only notions widely

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accepted, and that the subject matters of religion and philosophy are things more real than concrete and harder than chrome steel, Pry was greatly shocked and surprised. When Muller went on to the subject of 'Values' Pry found that those things which he had come to regard as his ideals were falling about his head in a litter of unimportance, and his whole attitude to 'Life' stood revealed to him as trumpery, adolescent and mean. For this he blamed his social environment — until Muller went on to talk about 'Environment'.

Sustained to some extent by the force of Muller's personality, Pry went on writing his book, it became for him, at one and the same time a gesture of independence of society and defiance of Muller, but it did not banish Pry's sense of guilt and exile in being unemployed. Although he never acknowledged it, Pry spent at least half his time writing unsuccessful applications for jobs as an engineer, and he was oppressed with a constant anxiety: his money was rapidly running out and in a few months he would be destitute.

'It is a boom year,' he would explain to Muller, 'there has been a splendid recovery under the Nominal Government, the wheels of industry are turning, manufactures are up, exports are up, trade is flourishing. Don't look at these fields of weeds that were once hop gardens, don't look at those blasted moth-eaten chickens, take the greater view — the Nominal view — look at the pictures on the hoardings, the pictures of streets and streets of new houses and happy, laughing families; look at the pictures of brawny medieval blacksmiths, resting their sledge hammers on gear

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wheels, against a background of prosperously smoking stack chimneys. Look at the pictures of barrels of beer — do you not see how fortunate we all are. The hoarding and the pronouncements of the inspired newspapers are the true indices of Prosperity. Don't notice me, a skilled engineer with nothing to do; don't notice the thousands like me, who fight like starving cats for every bit of a job that gets advertised in *The Times*. It's our fault entirely, or just an accident of distribution.'

Muller would regard him with half-amused eyes, noticing rather the intensity of feeling than the meaning of what Pry had said, asking him why he should disturb himself because other people told lies.

'That's all very well for you,' Pry would retort. 'You are a priest, or you would be, if there were any such thing as a living Church. People "lend" you money, and pay your rent because they want somebody to perform the priestly function for them. You have only to look like yourself, say "I am hungry, give me bread", talk disinterestedly for a bit, and people give you all you want, counting it a privilege. Nobody would pay me anything because of my presence, or what I have to say: I have no particular presence, and I've nothing that matters to say. I am not an itinerant Christian, I'm an Engineer.'

Then Muller would change the subject, back to Edward Carpenter, and the austere masters of beauty. The while Pry silently brooded on, tormented by the idea that since others had employment, since others must be getting the few jobs that were advertised,

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there must be some fault or weakness in himself, whereby he could not follow his calling.

Pry had a peculiar fondness for children, but he had never dared to be the father of a child. He would go over in a curious, sly way to Muller's cottage in the afternoon, in the hope that Kristin would let him take little Absolom, their boy, aged three, out on the heath to collect pine cones or down to the brook for sticklebacks. Kristin understood this perfectly, and challenged him with big eyes and a she-smile that might mean anything. Pry did all kinds of ingenious things to amuse the child, but little Absolom remained as much afraid of Pry as Pry was of Absolom. He would never touch the child or pick him up.

It was not that Pry lived a celibate life, for he certainly did not. For two years past he had been sleeping, every week or so, with Mary, and she now came down from London, regularly every Friday evening and returned on Monday morning. She was a schoolmistress working for the London County Council. She passed for Pry's wife in the little hamlet round Guff's farm, and she was in fact as much his wife as she would ever be, whilst they continued to use contraceptives. That was not half-way, but Pry, as he never ceased to remind himself, was unemployed, and his savings would scarcely last out to the end of the year. A child could not be fed on air, and were they to have a child Mary would be unemployed as well. Even the formality of marriage at a Registry Office, a pinch of incense on the altar, would not prevent her losing her job.

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During the long week days, when Pry sat humped up in the corner of the oast-house, labouring at his manuscript, Mary was never absent from his thoughts. That was not because he was in love with her, in any superficial sense of the word, but because he had set himself to describe, with the rigorous exactitude of an engineering specification and the patience of ten mules, the exact stages by which, in two years, they had reached their present condition of frustrated intimacy. It had been a slow, progressive process, in the strategy of which Pry had taken the keenest intellectual interest. In eleven chapters Pry had only got to the point where Mary had bought tinned cream to put on wild blackberries — an action which gravely offended his sense of good taste — and after a sulkiness which lasted for hours they had suddenly flung themselves together and stayed at an hotel under an assumed name. The breakdown at this point led inevitably to the episode where two brass wedding rings purchased by Pry from Woolworth's were flung into the River Avon. It was, in Pry's opinion, an important transition, but its accurate description in terms, not of blackberries and wedding rings, but of psychological and sexological processes, called for so nice a precision of words, and so clear a realization of the forces at work, that for hours he was unable to cope with its difficulty. There were also aspects of his subject matter that were still decidedly painful, for Pry had encountered Mary on the rebound from an earlier and more idyllic love, and sometimes he thought her unworthy of him because she was a schoolmistress and could neither write poetry nor sing.

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When Pry could not get on with his remarkable thesis on the technology of seduction, he would relapse into apathy and brood wretchedly, until the following Friday, about unemployment. As a kind of penance for idleness he read the long *Maurizius Case* and other works by Jacob Wassermann, the words thumping at him like the heavy, interminable arguments of advocates in courts of law. The oast-house at such times with its tramps who lay wheezing in the straw below, seemed an intolerable prison and he himself some spectral figure in a nightmare of futility. Then he would tear open the last copy of *The Engineer*, which he had posted to him every week, and apply for any job that was advertised, suitable or unsuitable, taking a horrible pleasure in the dull repetition of the particulars of his career, which he had committed to memory, parrot fashion.

One morning in late October, when this story opens, Pry went to the farm to get his usual daily half pint of milk, and found a letter for him — a reply to one of his applications. It was typed on a cheap piece of plain paper. It requested him to attend for interview on Thursday of that week, and gave only the name of the firm: Hydro-Mechanical Constructions (Great Britain) Ltd., with an address at Agastral House, London. Pry turned the piece of paper over and over: queer, he thought, that they had not used their business note-paper; they did not want to disclose the names of their Directors. A gag, probably, some ruse for getting young men to go out and live syphilitic lives on the Ruritanian oil wells, or from door to door selling

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vacuum cleaners. He placed before him a great file of papers, which he had labelled 'Search for Employment', and found the cutting of the advertisement to which the box number referred. It read:

Chemical Engineer, also Chemist, required to work near London. Must have highest qualifications, long industrial and research experience, be capable of holding really responsible positions, and at present unemployed. Apply Box No. K. 777, with fullest particulars in first instance.

Pry smiled grimly. One might suppose such men to be vital in Industry. Industry was booming — according to the Nominal Government — why should there be any such key men unemployed. The very wording of the advertisement was unpatriotic and seditious. It was fortunate that no one would ever hear of the five hundred and ninety odd men, all more or less satisfying the requirements, who would inevitably be scrambling for the job, whatever the salary. Pry decided to spend a shilling and search the records of Hydro-Mechanical Constructions (Great Britain) Ltd. at Somerset House.

It was at this time that Pry quarrelled with Muller. It was ostensibly about the hieroglyphics. Pry had a whim to copy hieroglyphics out of the Book of the Dead at the British Museum and to paint a frieze of them, bit by bit, in blue paint around the walls of the oast-house. Some of the characters were distinctly symbolic, not to say phallic, and conveyed all kinds of meanings to Pry when he gazed at them steadily. He was merry with the paint pot when Muller came over

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to borrow the typewriter. He told Muller eagerly about the letter from Hydro-Mechanical Constructions Ltd. Muller showed not the least interest in either hieroglyphics or hydromechanics, he was silently contemptuous and pitying.

'You are an idler,' he said, 'with a few pretty recreations.'

The truth in these words, and the sudden breach of a certain delicately sustained sympathy, cut Pry to the quick. He attacked Muller instantly and bitterly, none the less bitterly because he knew that he had failed Muller. He was idling away his time, and having found no way of living as a free lance, was preparing to sell himself again into Industry. Muller went away in silence, and it was Kristin who brought the typewriter back later.

Pry went to Somerset House, penetrated into the ward-rooms of Industrial Property, and turned up the number of Hydro-Mechanical Constructions Ltd. in a great register of Companies. He paid his shilling for a search ticket, handed it to a severe-eyed janitor, who observed his healthy appearance with suspicion, and took his seat amongst the people with unpleasant faces, the sharks, the skinflints and the brutal-jowled lawyers, who have to do with companies. The fat file of original documents, complete with signatures, was presently laid before him. Pry did not understand much about Company Law, and the significance of half the documents was obscure to him. The authorized capital of the Company was £3,000,000, divided into 1,500,000 Preference Shares at £1, and 6,000,000

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Ordinary Shares at 5s. Pry read the prospectus, and gathered that the object of the Company was to put up houses by pumping transparent cement from central pumping stations into steel shells, which were to be dismantled and used over and over again, until new towns stood glistening in the sun around the temporary buildings which housed their maternal pumps. This was the Hydro-Mechanical Constructional proposition, and the Company had begun by acquiring the world rights, together with a laboratory plant in Belgrade, from one Usidlenie Kosoff for £500,000 in cash and £500,000 in fully paid-up shares. The price paid for the invention seemed to Pry to be very nearly as dazzling as its possibilities; but the main point was that it was an enterprise that would most certainly need engineers, a good many engineers. It might even work, presumably it did, or nobody would have paid so much for it. The prospectus gave no estimate of the profits, but suggested darkly that because of the great importance of the new constructional process to Builders, Contractors, Municipal Authorities, Government Departments and War Offices over the entire civilized world it was impolitic to disclose the terrific profits that the shareholders would get. Nothing was contained in the prospectus about any houses that had actually been made by the process, but a letter from a chartered municipal engineer (in Urania) expressed the considered opinion that it would revolutionize the architectural industry [*sic*] and a university laboratory (in England) had tested a six-inch cube of the new material, and found it to have such and such a tensile strength, and

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such and such a modulus of elasticity, both of which figures were highly satisfactory. Pry wrote down the names of the Directors, for further investigation, and came away from Somerset House with a splitting headache through which struggled pleasurable anticipations of a 'job', squirting up a new town of crystal dwelling houses on some of the virgin pastures of England.

Pry spent the rest of the day in the Patent Office Library, concentrating on the technology of cement. In the evening he met Mary in a tea-shop, and told her what he had found out. Mary, who had little time for *talk* about independence and freedom, or for most of the things that Pry had discussed at such length with Muller in the oast-house, warmly congratulated him on the job he was within sight of getting, and said how satisfactory it would be to have a crystal home of their own, somewhere in the country, where they could live together all the time, and not just at week-ends.

Pry gathered that it would be just about nine months after the date of his appointment — if he should be appointed — that their first child would blink at the sunlight through its crystal container, and he spoilt the rest of the evening completely by a violent exposition of all this as an example of the way women tie men up with ropes, and heave on the last knot that fixes them for ever into the cage of the economic and industrial system.

## CHAPTER II

### INTRODUCING DR. ZAAREB . . .

PRY went up the plush-carpeted lift at Agastral House with his hat in his hand. He pushed open the frosted glass doors of Hydro-Mechanical Constructions (Great Britain) Ltd. (Registered Offices) and was shown by an elegant lady receptionist into a cubicle marked 'Waiting Room No. 3'. There was no possible doubt that he had come to the administrative centre of great undertakings. The walls were panelled with an expensive Australian satinwood, the chairs were upholstered in red leather, and on an oak table stood a neat pile of foreign technical journals. There was nothing indicating a restriction of this great company's activities to any particular business. Even the two photographs on the walls, of large factories and works abroad, taken from a distant view-point and exhibited without captions, merely represented Industry in the abstract. No sound of typewriters or jingling telephones disturbed the quietness. Pry waited for half an hour, looking at the toes of his shoes and occupied in a nervous process of spiritual preparation.

Mr. MacDuff's office had a deep pile carpet on the floor, an immense expanse of the satinwood panelling and a twenty-point bronze candelabrum suspended on chains. It would have done for a part of the royal suite at the Ritz and it was in every way a creditable setting

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for the Managing Director of even a £3,000,000 company. Mr. MacDuff was seated behind a very large desk, with a black mirror top, on which there was no confusion of papers, only a clean blotting pad, and a multiple telephone instrument. Mr. MacDuff was stout, but so perfectly turned out by Savile Row that his curves were restrained to a kind of top-like elegance. He rose, shook Pry's hand with unexpected warmth, and indicated a very strongly masculine, elderly gentleman, sitting in his overcoat and refusing to play up to the surroundings:

'Mr. Pry, I want ye to meet Dr. Zaareb, who is the Scientific Adviser to our Company.'

Dr. Zaareb put out his hand perfunctorily, rose three inches off his chair and at once composed himself again, indicating there need be no further delay in getting down to business.

Mr. MacDuff had read Pry's papers; Mr. Pry would understand that there had been a great many applications, in fact five hundred and sixty-seven, but Dr. Zaareb had sorted these down to four, and he was the first to be interviewed.

Pry wondered why, but acknowledged the compliment with a grim nod.

'I am now going to ask ye a few questions; you will not of course appreciate the reasons we have for putting these questions, but I want ye to answer them very carefully. Have you ever had anything to do with inventors?'

Pry had a fearful moment: had some secret information about one of his previous technical exploits leaked

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out and been traced back to him? Fortunately he decided that the question could only refer to inventors as a class.

'I've spent a lot of time trying to get them to talk sense,' he said.

'Precisely. That is just what we hoped you might say. And you were last employed making breakfast food out of sawdust in the distressed areas?'

'Yes,' said Pry.

'What kind of sawdust?' demanded Dr. Zaareb, with the air of one who tests all general statements by candidates.

'*Pinus sylvestris*, grade two, ex sawmills, Swedish origin.'

'Very good,' said Dr. Zaareb.

'You found no difficulty in maintaining authority over the *men*, when you were in the distressed areas?'

Pry recalled the emaciated wretches who would almost fall on their knees to get a job, and murder each other to keep it.

'No,' he said bitterly, 'I did not. Might I ask whether it is your intention to operate the Kosoff process on housing schemes in the distressed areas?'

'No,' said MacDuff, vastly amused.

'I should think not,' said Dr. Zaareb.

'Oh!' said Pry. He saw no reason for the amusement and was not going to be set aside because he had once made breakfast food when they wanted somebody to make extruded houses.

'You will realize,' he said, 'that I have done other

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things beside making substitutes for porridge. I've had years of experience of pumps. Pumping your silicic slurries into moulds to make houses would present no difficulties to me.'

'Wouldn't it . . .,' said MacDuff.

Pry flushed.

'Don't let us play the fool,' said Dr. Zaareb, 'tell me this: how would you determine the percentage of glucose in a dilute solution?' There was something in Dr. Zaareb's tone which indicated that it would be best to take this question very seriously.

'Boil off some of the water and measure the angle of rotation in a polarimeter,' said Pry, hoping to goodness that Dr. Zaareb was not going to pursue him too far into sugar technology.

'There is your answer,' said MacDuff, who seemed by now to be in a very good temper.

'Not quite,' said Zaareb, half closing his eyes and looking very hard at Mr. Pry, ' . . . and if there were other sugars present?'

'I should get an experienced analytical chemist, who had worked on sugars before, to determine total and reducing sugars with Fehling's solution, and I should correlate his results with my physical observations.' Pry spoke slowly and carefully, accepting Zaareb's challenge.

'I think that will do,' said MacDuff.

Dr. Zaareb nodded, and drew over MacDuff's desk-calendar towards him, to read a quotation from Swift, which appeared on it.

MacDuff turned to Pry: 'You are prepared to work

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for us, to deal as I shall direct with an inventor, to take charge of a factory, and assist the chemist whom we shall appoint contemporaneously with yourself to carry out a programme of experimental work, of a secret and confidential nature, under the direction of Dr. Zaareb?’

‘Certainly,’ said Pry.

‘For three hundred and seventy-five pounds a year?’

‘Four hundred?’ said Pry, tentatively.

‘And you are at present unemployed; you would be satisfied if this work lasted for only six months; I want ye clearly to understand that it may not last more than six months . . .’

‘I shouldn’t think it would,’ said Dr. Zaareb.

‘I should be quite satisfied,’ said Pry. He admired MacDuff for speaking so plainly, on this point at any rate, and mentally he added that he would gladly analyse glucose, squirt up houses, gaol inventors or anything else it might occur to them to want done, for the one inclusive salary, which was at least five times what it cost him to live in Kent.

MacDuff said they would naturally have to interview the other selected applicants, but it appeared quite certain to Pry that he had got the job, whatever it was. He distrusted the speed at which he had been chosen, and as he rose to go, he made one further attempt to find out what he would have to do. On a side table stood a number of six-inch cubes of transparent vitreous material. He picked one up and weighed it in his hand, he said:

‘Is this some of the stuff?’

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MacDuff took the cube from him and placed it ceremoniously on a wooden block which had been beneath the table.

'This,' he said, 'is pure vitrified silica.' As though that at once explained its great value and usefulness. 'It is practically shatterproof.' He then took a polished geological hammer from a drawer in his desk, assumed the stance of a blacksmith behind the cube, pushed back his sleeve — revealing a gold-studded shirt cuff, gripping a hairy forearm — and hit the cube a vigorous crack with the hammer.

Nothing happened.

The cube was certainly not shattered, but then Pry saw no reason to suppose that it would be — with anything short of a blow from a sledge. He did his best to look surprised and murmured 'resilient constructional material . . .'

The whole interview strongly aroused Pry's curiosity: why should they be taking on men to work on something that they obviously did not believe in? How had their choice come to fall on *him*? What had percentages of glucose to do with building houses by the Kosoff or any other system? Why was MacDuff so well dressed? Where did Dr. Zaareb, who was obviously a distinguished scientist, and an authority of some sort, come into it? Where were the works? And what was the dark reference to an inventor? One point at least could be checked up: if Zaareb was an authority on anything then he must have written a book about it. Pry made a bee-line for Foyle's in the Charing Cross Road and came away with a second-hand copy of

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Zaareb's *Chemistry of the Carbohydrates*, a standard work.

What did it matter anyway, with a man like Zaareb there, there could be nothing shady about what they were doing; it remained to do what he was asked, and for the moment to anticipate the good time coming, when he would not have to be for ever counting the small change in his pocket. He had exactly ten pounds left, which represented his entire resources. He squandered a pound on a good dinner and a visit to a theatre with Mary, spent twenty-five shillings on a silver watch, and returned to his oast-house in Kent.

It was dark and cold in the oast. The bed was damp, the cowl on the roof had started to leak, and a cold pool of rainwater had collected on the wooden table. Abner Muller and his family had gone from the cottage across the way. Pry shivered. The life had gone out of his Kentish interlude, the long enduring blooms of the tansies in the bit of pasture beneath his window were at last dead. He tied up his bundle of manuscript, it had become silly and futile. The precious eighteen months of freedom, which he had bought with his savings from ten years incarceration in factories, seemed to him to have been misspent. He pushed away from him the tremulous realization that he would never be the same Mr. Pry again, the beauty and colour of his surroundings in which he had lived at ease, the sensitive friendship with Muller, the taste of working at something of his own, had done that much for him. He would never again be unconscious of enslavement within the systems of industrialism, but he would know that he

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had to accept it, as a condition of life. Pry was sad. But an hour later he was smirking with glee, congratulating himself on the luck, which brought him a job just at the right time, delightedly looking forward to being at work again as an engineer, to the good companionship of *things*, chemicals and concrete and steel, forgetful of the human stupidity, tyranny and fear, which would inevitably intrude upon his work, and which make every factory a prison and all industrialism a chain gang.

Stepping light-footed about the rickety floor, as though under some mysterious compulsion to make no noise, Pry fried his bacon on the primus stove and brewed his tea. Then, because it was cold, he crawled early into his sleeping bag, and lay reading Dr. Zaareb's book. His new watch, symbol that his time would soon be a commodity that he had sold, and that must be measured and accounted for, he kept sliding in and out of his pocket. It was as smooth as a sucked sweet and he took a childish pleasure in its possession. He slept at last and dreamed that he was once again a boy, and that he wanted to make a little glistening machine, not so big as a typewriter, out of soluble sand. A bully, with big hands, held him back, and Muller came, his face all radiant calm, and kicked the glistening machine away. 'You are an idler', he said, 'with a few pretty recreations.'

The next morning it rained, and Pry walked about in the rain; at midday he received a telegram, he had got the job, and was to report for duty on Monday, as Resident Engineer. He could not bear another night

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in the oast, but would go to London, to seek euthanasia in the noise and the glitter of lights. He waited until it was dark; took down the makeshift window that would keep out the swallows, as it had kept out the wind, and went off down the road with his stable lamp. He left it by the side of the road to burn out.

### CHAPTER III

#### . . . AND MONSIEUR COCAINE

WHEN Pry reported for duty at the Head Offices of Hydro-Mechanical Constructions Ltd., he found that the attitude of Mr. MacDuff had changed. He was no longer entertaining a visitor, a man outside his jurisdiction, he was instructing an employee. He told Mr. Pry to take a seat whilst he finished reading some papers that lay before him.

'I have no doubt, Mr. Pry, that you would like to ask me a number of questions. Perhaps you will let those stand over.' He pressed a button on his desk and a buzzer sounded in the next office. His secretary entered. 'Miss Willoughby,' he said, 'I want you to bring me the Cocaine secret documents.'

'Monsieur Cocaine, I would have ye know, is a Belgian inventor to whom I referred in our previous interview. Our company has been placed in a very serious position, a very serious position indeed, by the operations of this gentleman. For reasons of policy it is necessary that he should remain at the works, and you are to treat him with courtesy, but you are not to permit him or his assistants to obtain any knowledge of the experiments you are about to undertake, and you will not permit him to operate any machine without your permission; if he attempts to do so you have express authority from the Board of this Company to stop him by any means you may consider necessary.'

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Miss Willoughby returned with a stout package, tied with tape and sealed, and conspicuously labelled: 'COCAINE SECRET DOCUMENTS.'

'I am going to hand you these papers. You will put them in the inner pocket of your overcoat, and you will not remove them until you arrive at the works, when you will deposit them in the safe that has been provided for their custody. When you have time you will read them but nothing you may read is to cause you to deviate one iota from the exact programme of experiments that has been otherwise prepared for you.'

Pry, who was beginning to wonder whether he had stepped into some international intrigue, a drug ring, or merely the second act of a melodrama, buttoned the package under his coat.

'I also hand you a patent specification — which discloses nothing...'

The patent was entitled 'Improvements relating to the production of Synthetic Carbon Compounds by Short Wave Irradiation'.

'... and the programme of experiments, prepared by Dr. Zaareb, which is to define your work for the next three months. You will have working with you an organic chemist, Mr. Ackworth, to whom I shall presently introduce you. You will be the responsible official of the Company in charge of the works. Have I made myself perfectly clear?'

'Perfectly. But the Kosoff houses...?'

'I shall not ask you to concern yourself with them.'

Pry's pleasant anticipations of a job in the country, pumping up rows of transparent houses, evaporated

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into thin air. MacDuff, who had been watching his face, perceived Pry's disappointment, and MacDuff, for all that he was deliberate and standing no nonsense, had no desire to snub a man of his own profession in whom he was reposing a trust. He had something both of the build and of the ethics of a heavyweight boxer, he liked to swagger and he liked to hit hard, but he did not take mean advantages. He stepped from behind his desk and clapped a powerful but friendly hand on Pry's shoulder.

'I say that, Mr. Pry, because you are going to have enough to do with Dr. Zaareb's experiments, ye need not be disappointed, it's a big job of work.' He sat down on one of the visitor's chairs, thereby momentarily relinquishing his position of authority.

'Have ye ever heard of Emil Fischer's work on d. glucose and Baly's synthesis of it from water and carbon dioxide?'

Pry tried to recall what he had learnt of Fischer's work during a Polytechnic chemistry course some ten years past, the Baly stuff was at that time controversial, and had not been mentioned by the lecturers, he had read about it, from time to time, in technical journals.

'Wasn't it Fischer who first showed the constitution of d. glucose by synthesizing it via acrolein, acrosone and so on — the purely chemical approach, and isn't it Baly who has recently come along with physico-chemical methods which cut all that out and show how sugar can be synthesized in a way that *may* occur in nature, in the living plant? He got a trace of sugar under certain conditions — only an infinitesimal trace,

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but he got it — just by exposing water and carbon dioxide to light? I felt very excited when I read about his discovery, but some people seem to be concerned only to pooh-pooh it.'

'You know more about it than I do. But the point now is that Monsieur Cocaine claims to be able to synthesize sugar, by the ton, out of the atmosphere, and this Company has erected a two hundred and fifty thousand pound plant for the commercial exploitation of the process.'

'WHAT . . .?' said Pry.

'Those are the facts.'

'And you mean that these papers I have in my pocket contain the secrets of this process. . . .'

MacDuff smiled. 'Do not disturb yourself, we have had what were alleged to be samples, but the inventor, whom you are now going to "assist", can never make sugar when anyone is looking, and it is very questionable whether the process works at all. Most of what is written on those papers we now know to be moonshine.'

'But how . . .?'

'But how did this Company come to be taken in? That is too long a story, you will hear all about it in time.'

'Meanwhile, you seriously expect that Dr. Zaareb, this Mr. Ackworth and I, are going to settle down and just make the process work — in six months? That we are going to do what has defeated the wit of man for six thousand years: side-track the cornfield and probe the last mystery of the green leaf?'

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Mr. MacDuff had risen and was once again the Managing Director of the Company.

'It is very nice, Mr. Pry, to have had this little chat about green leaves and the mysteries of nature, but what you have to understand is that this sugar has got to be produced in commercial quantities out of the atmosphere, before the next General Meeting of this Company, which will take place just six months hence. Those are your instructions. I now want ye to meet Mr. Ackworth.'

Mr. Ackworth was some years younger than Mr. Pry, and was rather too well cushioned for his height and age. He came from Yorkshire, where he had last been employed as a research chemist in a soap works. He was equally unaffected by the impressiveness of Mr. MacDuff, the magnificence of the head offices of Hydro-Mechanical Constructions Ltd., and the magnitude of the task on which he was embarking. It was, as MacDuff told Pry some months later, for these very qualities of impassivity and unpuncturable complacency that he had been selected. The reason being that the last British chemist who had worked in the same building with Monsieur Cocaine had gone mad, and the Company had been held responsible.

MacDuff introduced Ackworth and Pry to each other, delineated their functions, and added a further solemn warning about the inventor.

'Aye laad,' said Ackworth cheerily, 'we won't have him come buttin' his long nose in.'

The imposing Mr. MacDuff eyed Mr. Ackworth approvingly, and turned to shake hands with Dr..

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Zaareb, who at that moment had appeared in the doorway.

'Since we're all ready, let's go,' said Dr. Zaareb.

A large Chrysler swung into the kerb as the party descended the steps of Agastral House, and the chauffeur, in grey livery, flung open the doors and stood at attention. Pry noticed that Dr. Zaareb got in first and MacDuff followed.

'No, I have no use for a car,' said Dr. Zaareb, in reply to a remark from Mr. MacDuff, which invited a word of appreciation of the chromium-plated monster in which they were travelling, 'It's generally quicker to go by the Underground'.

They crept along behind a bone merchant's cart, by Tower Hill, and thence through a maze of slum streets into the Commercial Road. They appeared to be making for the docks, but went on past Shadwell and Stepney and Barking, and were presently speeding down a new concrete road towards Rainham Marshes. They continued for another fifteen minutes and at last turned off the road at a place where two concrete posts marked the entrance to an industrial reservation. There was no fence or wall on either side of the posts and no gate between them. But one of the posts carried a board, on which an inexpert signwriter had painted up the name of the firm with an arrow TO THE WORKS.

Peering through the windscreen of the car, Pry saw a long and narrow cinder road, with low concrete bridges where it crossed the dikes, and leading up to a rectangular factory building, with an asbestos roof,

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the shape of which he could just make out through the river mist. All around, and below the level of the road, were sodden fields, and beyond them uniform rows of the brick hutches into which a beneficent London removes dwellers from the slums. No other building was near the factory, except a power station which stood on the other side of a creek. Pry recognized the power station from photographs he had seen in *The Engineer*, its curiously squat, sarcophagus-like architectural treatment was unmistakable. It was the East Bullock Power Station, supplying the new electric line to Tilbury and feeding into the grid.

The car pulled up at the works door, and Mr. MacDuff, stetson hat on head, kid gloves and silver-loaded cane in his hands, kicked open a wicket gate and went in. He went straight as a line of force to an office which had been made, like others beside it, with bare brick walls from the floor to the roof, and he demanded the immediate appearance of Monsieur Cocaine. A fawning little man, Cocaine's assistant, almost scraped the ground and scuttled off. After a considerable time Monsieur Cocaine himself pushed open the door with insolent slowness and stood resentfully in the opening as in a frame. His left sleeve was empty and pinned to his coat. MacDuff wasted no time on greetings but at once opened fire:

'Was it or was it not my instruction that all the doors to this factory are to be kept locked?'

'You it is who gives the instructions, ha! You sit in big chair to give me instructions, but I, I have my experiments, I cannot leave my experiments . . .'

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'Are you or are you not, amongst other of your designations, Works Manager of this factory?'

'I am a technician . . .'

'It is now the intention of the Board to disembarass you of some of the functions that have hampered your invaluable activities as a technician. As you have been notified, Mr. Pry will from this moment take charge of the factory, and Mr. Ackworth will occupy your laboratory. In order that you may have absolute privacy in which to pursue your experimentation, a new laboratory will be constructed for you, and when that is ready, you will interpret the wishes of the Board correctly if you remain in it.'

'Couldn't the Company afford a hat rack for this office,' grumbled Dr. Zaareb, who had been pushing round to find somewhere to hang his black Homburg.

MacDuff turned to Pry: 'See that a hat rack has been put in before Dr. Zaareb comes here again. Obtain an estimate and report to me.'

'Very well,' said Pry.

'I spit at you,' said Monsieur Cocaine, withdrawing from the door and slamming it after him.

MacDuff did not look round, but led the way through another door into what he called a 'pilot plant', where processes were to be tried out on a small scale before they were attempted in the works. He did not stay there but went on at once to the main plant.

Pry gasped. The place was a forest of quartz tubing. Quartz tubes forty feet high that zigzagged from the floor to the roof between mains of stainless steel, there must have been many thousands of them and between

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the banks of tubes were lofty stagings, carrying batteries of powerful lamps, encased like searchlights. A process man in a white coat, who was pretending to be busy polishing the tubes, looked like Jack in some magical forest of Pyrex beanstalks. MacDuff shouted to him:

'Switch on No. 7 Battery.'

The man descended and pushed in some switches on a control panel by the wall. He watched the slow movement of an ammeter needle, and when it passed a red line, he swung round a large ebonite wheel. There was an explosive sound as the current leapt across an air gap, and one of the batteries of lamps flooded its bank of quartz tubes with an intense, quivering, greenish light.

'Don't look at those lamps,' cried Zaareb, pushing Pry and Ackworth back. 'You don't *have* to get conjunctivitis.'

The process man handed round some goggles, and then stood beside MacDuff, watching the spectacle with evident pleasure.

'Well, what are you waiting for?' thundered MacDuff. 'Turn on the gas.'

The man hurried to a row of gas cylinders beyond the switchboard, and turned on a tap. A stream of bubbles wobbled slowly up the quartz tubes, glistening like fireworks in the vivid light.

'Fantastic,' said Dr. Zaareb, but whether he referred to the spectacle, or to the inventor's intentions, he did not say. Probably both, thought Pry, who was beginning to appreciate Dr. Zaareb's nice economy of speech.

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'What is supposed to be happening?' asked Pry diffidently.

'Oh! Bombardment of CO<sub>2</sub> molecules in presence of contact catalyst with quanta at resonant frequency, of course, but it's fantastic.'

Pry had another shot, this time with MacDuff, 'Where does one draw off the product?'

'In the bankruptcy court,' replied MacDuff grimly. 'Come, you'll have enough time to play with these pyrotechnics. Put those damned lamps out and come into the laboratory.'

He pushed a bunsen burner out of the way and leant against the laboratory bench. 'Now,' he said, 'all that chimerical fantadiddle doesn't work, there's no use wasting time with it, but Dr. Zaareb is of the opinion that with some properly systematized investigation, something can be made to justify our keeping this place going.'

'Mind, I am not promising anything,' said Dr. Zaareb.

'There's one thing you'll find it practically impossible to do,' said MacDuff, laughing, 'and that is to get Dr. Zaareb to promise anything before it is done, but the Board and I personally have a very great respect for Dr. Zaareb's opinion, and we are going on. If you gentlemen should succeed in making sugar out of the atmosphere in six months, your jobs will continue, and your salaries will be increased. If you do not succeed this Company will be put into liquidation. You are to have all the apparatus and assistance you require, and you are to start at once.' He turned to

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Dr. Zaareb: 'How many experimental radiators have they got here?'

'One,' said Dr. Zaareb.

'You will order another six immediately.'

'Very well,' said Mr. Pry.

MacDuff looked at his wrist watch, 'Dr. Zaareb may desire to discuss one or two points with you, whilst I deal with Cocaine, but in ten minutes we shall return to Town. After that you will communicate with me when it is necessary and only when it is necessary'.

Dr. Zaareb went into the office and sat down.

'I am not going to do any talking at this stage, and I don't want to hear your preconceptions. Read your programmes carefully, do what I there tell you, to familiarize yourselves with the processes, and then work out the best way of determining small percentages of sugar accurately. Report to MacDuff. That will keep you busy until I come out next Wednesday.'

'I think we'll manage,' said Pry.

'It is more important that I should think so. I had a very full account of you from Professor Rumpstein. If you could put up with him, making breakfast food out of sawdust in North Durham, you ought to be able to manage Cocaine. *Good-bye.*'

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SECRET BOOK

'PHEW!' said Pry, as the Chrysler crunched over the cinder track and disappeared in the mist.

'An' thaat's thaat,' said Ackworth, methodically filling his pipe.

Pry took the Cocaine documents out of his overcoat pocket and locked them in the safe. Then he removed his overcoat and looked around the office. A large double desk and two executive's chairs were its principal furniture. The chair in which Ackworth was sitting commanded a view of the entrance to the laboratory, and also, when the door was open, of the General office and the telephone switchboard.

'Now, if you agree, we make a tour of inspection and rustle up that inventor,' said Ackworth.

'They'll keep. Better first make ourselves comfortable. Do you mind if I have *that* chair, I'm funny, can't stand the light over my right shoulder . . .'

Ackworth didn't mind at all, and Pry took the strategic position, 'I'm now going to read that programme slowly and see where we start'.

'Rightee-oh,' said Ackworth, 'call me when you want me.'

Pry glanced up in surprise as Ackworth disappeared, shrugged his shoulders, and began on the programme. It was drawn up like a laboratory manual for a not too

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advanced chemistry class, and it was reasonably easy to follow. There were first of all methods to be worked through for determining amounts of glucose, formaldehyde, carbon dioxide, and other substances, then there were descriptions of experiments in which the effect of radiation on various solutions was to be observed, with model forms for recording the results, and a number of mathematical formulae, with their constants, for making the calculations. There was a lot of work to be done, as each experiment had to be repeated again and again, varying one factor at a time, over a wide range of values. It was a piece of physico-chemical exploration, which would depend on the explorers' ability to check up their position at any stage by fine chemical analysis. Pry put the programme in his pocket, that being the safest place for it, and went to find Ackworth.

Ackworth was busy taking down pieces of apparatus out of the laboratory cupboards and making a list of them on a scribbling pad. 'I say, old man, they've only got one Soxhlet!'

'How many d'you want?' said Pry.

'Can't say yet,' said Ackworth, a little offended, 'until I've prepared my laboratory inventories, but that's a funny thing, only one Soxhlet.'

'Suppose we leave that for the moment and make a start on the programme . . .'

Ackworth picked up his scribbling pad and closed the laboratory cupboard reluctantly, 'Oh-kay, I'll just see what analytical books they've got here'.

He had been fumbling in the bookcase for about

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four minutes when Pry started again: 'We're going to have our first report off by the post to-morrow night . . .'

'Haven't anything ready yet,' said Ackworth. 'What's it matter?'

'It matters one hell of a lot,' said Pry. 'I don't anticipate we shall ever make any sugar, but making the right impression on Zaareb and MacDuff is more feasible, let's start . . .'

In something rather less than an hour Pry had the protesting Ackworth making titrations of sugar solutions, and the vacuum oven was going. It irked Pry to have to wait for Ackworth, who was at best excessively deliberate, just because these operations happened to be 'chemical'. He had not Ackworth's chemical qualifications, but he saw no reason why that should prevent him from measuring just how much of a particular solution was required to change another solution from a beautiful ammoniacal blue into a bright red mud. He had done it often enough. He fretted about the laboratory for some time and then said: 'Since you haven't an assistant, don't you think it would be a good idea if you taught me just the elementary parts of some of this, so that I can give you a hand?'

Again Ackworth didn't mind, and the operations on the laboratory bench began to move at a speed determined by Mr. Pry. Ackworth was a sociable person, who began to seek for distractions as soon as he was left to work by himself, and Pry made a mental note of it. In the afternoon, when enough had been done to assure that there would be one or two results which

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he could work up into a report the next day, Pry, in effect, let Ackworth off, and accompanied him on a tour of the works.

The factory was lofty and spacious, the Cocaine quartz tube installation only occupied one bay, another had been provided for extensions, and yet another for auxiliary machinery, and the great glass storage vats, to contain the sugar that was to have been produced. Near these vats stood hundreds of glass carboys, vessels of ten gallons capacity, packed with straw in steel baskets. Pry called to a rueful looking man with a bulging forehead, who was about the place, and asked him if he could say what they contained.

‘That is some of Mr. Cocaine’s glucose, sir, wot wasn’t sent away.’

‘Thanks. Now what is your name, and what do you do here?’

‘Name of Plumnox, sir, bin here since it was all put in, sir, but I don’t know nothink, I’m nobody, you ask that little toad, he treats me like dirt . . .’

Pry looked across at Ackworth. ‘Meaning . . .?’ he continued.

‘That dirty little crawler, Pinks, sir.’

‘Ah! I expect we shall come to him presently. Now Plumnox, you just get into the laboratory and fetch me a beaker, will you?’

‘And pleased to do it, sir, knowing what I do.’

Ackworth stirred up the contents of one of the carboys and drew off a sample into the beaker. ‘Put it in two bottles,’ said Pry, ‘we’ll keep one in the safe, and the other we’ll analyse . . .’

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'Mr. Cocaine, sir, he tests it by holding it up to the light, and when it's like he wants it he says, "Plummox," he says, "if you can make the glucose like that you will know the Cocaine secret", but other times he says, "No! no good yet", and he tells me to pour it down the drain, sir.'

'Ever seen a polarimeter, Plummox?'

'No, sir, not here, sir.'

'Splendid, now tell us some more, what's that?'

'That's the compressor, sir, it hasn't ever bin used, but I heard Mr. Pike, that was the contractor's engineer, sir, telling Mr. MacDuff it was to make liquid air, sir, to get the carbon out.'

'And where do you get your "carbon" from now?'

'Out of them cylinders, sir, it comes out as a sort of gas, like.'

'Carbon dioxide, Plummox, is a gas. Except when it's compressed or frozen, when it may be either a liquid or a solid. In those cylinders it's liquid. Ever seen any solid, here; the stuff they use in the icecream carts?'

'No, never, sir.'

'Never mind . . . this the stores?'

'Nobody isn't allowed to go in there, sir, except Mr. Cocaine.'

'Go to Mr. Cocaine, give him my compliments, and tell him I want the key.'

Plummox looked scared, and he hesitated: 'If you say so I suppose it's all right, sir . . .' he hitched his trousers humorously and spat on the floor. 'I'll go!'

'On the contrary,' murmured Pry, as Plummox retreated, 'I think we shall keep *you* on.'

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Plummox returned quite soon with the little man who had been so obsequious to MacDuff when they arrived that day. 'This is Mr. Pinks, sir, he says Mr. Cocaine says you can't have the key, sir.'

'Those are Mr. Cocaine's orders,' said Pinks, sullenly.

'What a pity,' said Pry. 'I really do want to see in these stores — Mr. Ackworth, just telephone MacDuff for me, will you, I'll be along in a minute. Mr. Pinks, I have got your name right, haven't I, extremely sorry to have troubled you.'

Happening to glance back on his way to the office, Pry saw Plummox bent forward with his hands on his knees, laughing with exaggerated derision at the disappearing figure of Mr. Pinks. In the office Ackworth was sitting on the table, whistling through his lips.

'Awfully sorry, Mr. Ackworth, to order you about like that, but you see the game, don't you?'

'Oh, that's all right, just carry on — by the way, I've got the key.'

'The devil you have! How?'

'That Belgian blonde outside, calls herself the Interpreter, made out the number was engaged, and while we were arguing, the Old Man himself came forth and gave it to me. Said he wouldn't give it you because you aren't a technician . . .'

Pry shoved him off the table, and the two trailed down to the stores again, where Plummox was still waiting about. The stores contained a number of kegs and boxes of chemicals, with rows of dusty Winchester bottles, but its principal item of merchandise was a score of large barrels stencilled: 'PURE CORN SYRUP.'

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'Know what that's used for?' Pry asked Plummox.

'That's what Mr. Cocaine calls "Enrichment", sir, he puts it in himself, it's a sort of syrup, sir, sweet like.'

Pry saw Cocaine and Pinks off the premises that evening and waited for the night watchman, to whom he gave some very definite instructions.

East Bullock was not a prepossessing place in which to seek for lodgings. All that remained of the old Essex town was the corn exchange, the church, and a few old buildings, which had been converted to serve the needs of multiple stores. For the rest it was all new housing estates, with scarcely a house big enough to provide a spare room for a lodger. The main street was grey and wet, trams shrieked along it; bright and garish suburban shops, nasty London public houses, super cinemas and fried fish bars provided all the luxuries of the inhabitants, and the whole place screamed aloud: 'I am a cheap substitute for a slum.' It was the last place on earth in which Pry would have chosen to live. He went to the old part of the town and at length found Mrs. Alison's Boarding House.

Mrs. Alison received Pry with a readiness that should have put him on his guard, but Mr. Alison had once been a nonconformist minister, and when Pry explained that his wife was compelled to work in London, and would only be sleeping with him from time to time, the reverend Mr. Alison refused point blank to countenance such an arrangement. His scruples were only overcome after a conference with Mrs. Alison *in camera*, where no doubt economic considerations prevailed over a too exemplary rectitude.

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The reverend gentleman presided at the table over his guests, and Pry proceeded at one and the same time to intrigue his host and to cut himself off from the conversation of the other lodgers, by propping up before him a copy of the New Testament in French, which he read stolidly over the stew and tapioca pudding. Later, the minister, who held to the old Spanish custom of inquiring into the affairs and qualities of his guests, set himself squarely before Pry. He had noticed that Pry had been reading the Testament in a foreign language.

‘Very amusing,’ said Pry.

‘I should not have thought that “amusing” would be *quite* the right word . . .’

‘Perhaps it’s just the way I translate it to myself,’ added Pry, feeling that this did not really improve matters.

Pry retired to his bedroom, bolted the door, put a shilling in the meter for the gas fire — which he fully intended to charge up to Hydro-Mechanical Constructions (Great Britain) Ltd., as expenses — and settled down to read the Cocaine documents — amongst which he found ‘The Secret Book’.

It bore the sub-title: ‘Expositions secret and documental, of the processes bio-physico-chemical COCAINE, with explications express and definitive, for industrial manufacturers to produce specific compounds Carbohydrate and Protein, synthetically and economically, from the spontaneous gases of the atmosphere.’

‘Xavier Etienne Marcel St. August Cocaine.’

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There were seventy typewritten sheets, in French, with numerous addenda and supplementary reports. The first fifty pages were devoted to an enthusiastic exposition of the fact that a great many substances, the class of things known chemically as Carbohydrates, contain carbon, oxygen and hydrogen, in such proportions that so many molecules of carbon *appear* to be combined with so many molecules of water and nothing else: Glucose, 3 molecules of carbon plus 12 molecules of water; Starch, 3 molecules of carbon plus 10 of water; Cane Sugar, 3 molecules of carbon plus 11 molecules of water, and so on; and that when they are burned they decompose into water and carbon dioxide and nothing else.

These well-known facts appeared to have struck M. Cocaine in an exalted moment as entirely new and original discoveries of his own; and he set them forth with a good many mistakes but with an embroidery of astrological and alchemical farrago worthy of the Dark Ages. He went on to assert that these carbohydrates are elaborated in nature, in green leaves, from the gases of the atmosphere, under the influences of the sun, moon, planets and nearer stars, and came at last to his own experiments. Under favourable conditions of the electric charge *ciel-terre*, terrestrial magnetism, barometric pressure and so on, he had succeeded after countless failures and by an inspired choice of catalysts, in bringing about the direct combination of carbon dioxide and water *in vitro* and he had produced glucose. He had bombarded the molecules of water and carbon dioxide with actinic radiations of crucial

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frequency [*sic*] and produced the 'hexotic' sugar  $C_6H_{12}O_6$ . He gave a numerical example which, on examination, showed that the amount of sugar produced contained five times as much carbon as he had put into the apparatus in any form, and he proceeded at once to explain that his invention rendered it possible to combine carbon dioxide and water in all proportions to form that host of sugary and starchy substances which, as he truly said, constitute the principal nutriment of man and beast. All that was necessary to produce carbohydrates other than glucose was to select a suitable catalyst from a list of about 700 substances which appeared in the appendix, and to prolong the bombardment for an *époque convenable* or suitable time.

Monsieur Cocaine did not mention what happened to the oxygen which carbon dioxide contains in combination with carbon, nor did he limit himself to producing out of the atmosphere merely the Bread of Life. He would also supply the Meat. Proteins of all kinds could be made by introducing simple nitrogenous gases into the apparatus. Naturally, he said, certain investigations of a simple character would be necessary to ensure the best functioning of the Cocaine process when applied to making proteins, but these investigations, although not yet commenced, would present no practical difficulty. An addendum to the main document dealt with the methods of applying the process, by the addition of small amounts of sulphur, phosphorus and other necessary elements for the manufacture of all classes of alkaloids and synthetic or natural drugs.

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On the whole, a work of no inconsiderable magnitude. The innocence and the sky-scraping optimism of this long rigmarole acted upon Pry like a charm. It was all mad, all utterly fantastic, and yet it was a man's dream. He began to see how financiers, unable to criticize or to see the glaring errors of scientific fact with which the thing was riddled, had been carried away by its promise of undreamed-of wealth. It would be easy to dismiss it all as nonsense, but what mattered was this: had Cocaine ever, no matter by what means, produced a single gramme of sugar from the gases of the atmosphere. If he had, then it could be done again, and a way might be forced from that single gramme to thousands of tons. If he had not, the whole exploit was a swindle from the roots up. Pry determined to find out about that gramme of sugar and to reserve his judgment of Cocaine.

The next day was the first of many unbroken days of methodical work in the laboratory, with Ackworth and Pry between them, working through the experiments that Dr. Zaareb had prescribed, and recording the results on typed forms. The first report, which was duly sent off to MacDuff, dealt with one very simple point in the determination of sugars, and was not intrinsically of any importance, but it gave an impression of energy, thoroughness, rapidity of action and fine-tooth-comb methods of attacking the job, with considerable artistry. Pry had done that sort of thing before. It never so much as occurred to him just to put the facts down on paper and leave it at that; they had to be used and fitted into a way of presentation

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which would produce a desired effect on their recipient.

The report was successful, in that Zaareb and MacDuff congratulated themselves on finding two young men who were exactly 'what was required'.

As the days went on a natural division of the work took place between Ackworth and Pry: Ackworth staying in the laboratory and working on the chemical problems, and Pry investigating the lamps, the nature and intensity of their radiation. When Dr. Zaareb came to the works on the second of his weekly visits, Ackworth and Pry had got far enough to make a proper trial of the alleged Cocaine process in the laboratory. They passed pure carbon dioxide through distilled water in which was suspended the specified amount of granulated mica, and irradiated the tube with one of the lamps that Cocaine had been using. The result, which greatly surprised Pry, was that they did get a very small amount of some kind of sugar: a positive reaction for sugar with delicate chemical tests.

'Do not let that surprise you,' said Dr. Zaareb, 'it's been done before, if you knew where to look for it you could find it in the scientific literature.'

'Then,' said Pry, 'there is something in all this, it is *not* just a ramp?'

'Certainly there is something in it; do you suppose that *I* should have anything to do with it, if there were not? But what use is a solution containing less than 0.002 per cent of an unknown kind of sugar to anybody?'

'But the idea is sound?'

## THE SECRET BOOK

'It can never be sound to spend five pounds to produce a trace of sugar, when you can go out and buy a pound of sugar for twopence-halfpenny at a grocer's. The whole idea's preposterous!'

'Then . . . ?'

'They do not ask me for my opinion of the commercial value of the process; they are supposed to be business men; they ask me whether it does make sugar, and I tell them quite truthfully that it does, twenty parts of sugar in a million of water.'

'Our object is to increase the concentration?'

'That is remarkable deduction on your part.'

'And all the stuff in the Cocaine Secret Book?'

'Rubbish. Chimerical nonsense. The man cannot even spell, he writes *allotropique*, *allotropique* mind you, when what he means to say is *aliphatic*; come let us look at that polarimeter you've got from Griffen and Tatlock's.'

'You know Cocaine has been putting corn syrup into his product?'

'Of course he has, even Cocaine couldn't send out samples with only twenty parts in a million of water. What would you have him put in? Corn syrup's cheap enough.'

'Oh!' said Pry. Dr. Zaareb's remarks had one of the virtues of logic: they were totally amoral.

## CHAPTER V

## A BLUE CATALYST

'THE next thing that you and Mr. Ackworth have to do,' continued Dr. Zaareb, 'is to try out my blue catalyst. And this is where we depart from Monsieur Cocaine. It was very obliging of him to dress up the idea, which he may or may not have borrowed from Baly, with all that charlatanism for the purposes of Company promotion — after all, it got the thing started. But there our gratitude to M. Cocaine finishes, and *I* am going to take a hand.'

Zaareb produced a small jar from his pocket containing an opaque blue jelly.

'Incidentally, this is also where we depart from Baly and his colleagues, but that's a very different matter. Baly was concerned to show that carbohydrates *can* be photosynthesized from carbonic acid in the laboratory without the help of any living organism or *vis vitalis*. That he has done brilliantly, and his work ranks in historical significance with Wöhler's synthesis of urea. But I am taking a new degree of freedom; I am introducing organic substances into my catalyst to start with, and I would even introduce a living alga, if I could think of one that might help; our problem is the commercial synthesis of sugar, and I conceive myself free to adopt *any* means to bring it about . . . I'm leaving this with you and you'd better look after it.'

## A BLUE CATALYST

Pry put the jar in the safe: 'What do you expect it will do?' he asked respectfully.

'Oh, I'm not going to be cross-examined about it, and I'm not a clairvoyant, but it's an idea I've been toying with ever since MacDuff had the sense to call me in on this business. Try it instead of Cocaine's fancy adjuvants — the man hasn't the faintest idea what a catalyst is — but leave in the mica, it isn't a catalyst, but it might do some good in reflecting and scattering the light. Out of the mouths of babes . . . Try it with and without the mica and let me know how you get on.'

Pry was itching to make a start with the new stuff, but did not immediately do so. He was uneasy: he did not like the way Cocaine and Pinks hurried back into their office next door whenever Zaareb came. That afternoon he examined the brick partition wall between the two offices, and rearranged all the furniture, half expecting to find a microphone. There was none, of course, but after a while he stared at the window, then he went and strolled past the offices on the outside. The window in Cocaine's office was near to their own, and when both were open eavesdropping would present no difficulty. He decided that the draught from the window annoyed him and had it screwed up, substituting a wooden panel for one of the glass panes, with a quietly humming electric fan. There was no need to lock the outer door to the laboratory, as he had already determined — as he said for structural reasons — that the new laboratory for M. Cocaine should be built on that side, and the door-

## SUGAR IN THE AIR

way had already been bricked up. The only entrance to the laboratory was through the office that Pry and Ackworth shared.

Privacy seemed to be fairly well assured. But he was taking a further cautious look round the following evening, prior to doing spectacular things with the blue catalyst the next day, when he stumbled on the ubiquitous and innocent looking lab. boy Tomkins, pouring a few drops from a new bottle of trihydroxy-triethylamine oleate into a specimen tube, and licking a pencil as he struggled with writing out the cumbrous name of the substance on the back of a packet of Woodbines. Pry said nothing, and it did not matter, as the substance had only been used for cleaning certain apparatus, but he related the occurrence with the fact that Tomkins had been coming to work on a new bicycle and he asked Plummox about him. It was known in East Bullock that he was a brother-in-law of Mr. Pinks. The next day Pry went into the lavatories when he knew he would be sure to find the boy smoking, and he discharged him on the spot for that offence.

After this purge, Pry and Ackworth tried the blue catalyst.

It increased the yield of sugar from twenty to nearly seventy parts per million. The cost of electric current for the lamps was still some three thousand times the value of the sugar produced, but it was an advance in the right direction; something better than had ever been done before.

‘H’m,’ said Dr. Zaareb, when he saw the figures.

## A BLUE CATALYST

'Disappointing in performance but correct in principle. How long have we been working here?'

'Exactly three weeks,' said Pry.

'Not bad, now you will retain Cocaine's mica, substitute the blue catalyst for the choice of seven hundred things Cocaine offers us in his appendix, and go on with the programme systematically. Section D is now cut out and to that extent the investigation has been narrowed down.'

'What *is* the catalytic action?' asked Pry, a little too breezily.

'It is not a matter with which you, as an engineer, need concern yourself,' said Zaareb, tartly, 'it is something that you may very properly leave to me.'

Pry winced and said nothing.

He watched Zaareb and Ackworth making a further supply of the stuff. It was a mixture of fine chalk and a little vegetable jelly which had to be soaked in one solution after another. Some of the solutions were ordinary enough, containing simple salts of iron and magnesium, whilst others were complex organic dye-stuffs with names as long as Welsh railway stations. The chalk and the jelly sopped up the solutions, sometimes swelling up to fill the jar, and then being brought down again in curds with the addition of the next constituent.

'... tervalent electrolyte ... thixotropic ... reversible coagulum ... chromophores ... enolic changes ...' went on Dr. Zaareb explaining to Ackworth the stages in the preparation. Pry understood a part of it, but not all. It seemed to him that the chemically

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treated chalk, suspended in jelly, would be rather like the grains of chlorophyll suspended in protoplasmic jelly within the tissues of a plant. the intramolecular spaces in the jelly forming a sort of honeycomb or soft matrix, in which the carbonic acid would be held, and in which the sugar would be gently retained during the embryonic stages of its formation. As nature had a very long start in this business of photosynthesis, it did not seem at all a bad idea to imitate its technique, so far at any rate. But Pry was wise enough, for once, not to offer these notions to Dr. Zaareb and inquire whether they were valid. As an engineer he was not expected ever to have done any elementary botany, in fact he knew so little that he had probably overlooked some vitally significant point, and Zaareb had a withering way of refusing to suffer fools gladly.

What Pry did understand quite clearly was that in the final stages of its preparation the blue catalyst had to stand for ten days, before the addition of a few drops of a solution of phosphates would render it fit and ready for use. In the meantime they would not have enough to go on with. But Zaareb had foreseen that. He took a pint bottle from his bag and left it on the bench.

'Not much danger of Cocaine making anything of this — even if he sees us using it, or even gets hold of some of it — is there?' asked the persevering Mr. Pry. 'So far there's nothing in writing.'

'No, but be careful, get your report off to Mr. MacDuff at once — *before* Cocaine's people get to hear what's in the wind — and when Cocaine sees the blue

## A BLUE CATALYST

stuff in the tubes, tell him you are just using a coloured pigment, because green leaves contain pigment, that's been done before, and it will mislead him beautifully.'

Pry wrote the report to MacDuff. The increase in the yield of sugar from a mere trace to something that was still little more than a trace, was not a very great step forward, but he made the most of it, and by the time he had finished, he had at least worked himself up into the liveliest enthusiasm for Zaareb's blue catalyst. An enthusiasm quickened with a streak of jealousy, for he desired that it should be he, himself — that day put in his place as a mere engineer — who would make the next step forward.

During the days that followed Pry took a tall stool into the works; had some of the flood lamps turned on, and sat, in protective goggles, watching the gas bubbling up through the main quartz tubes, with and without Zaareb's blue catalyst. He watched the spectacle in a kind of trance for hours on end, permitting no one to disturb him. The spectacle itself could tell him nothing, at best it was a point of focus for his thoughts. But he stared so long that at last it seemed to him that those bubbles, wobbling unsteadily up through the irradiated liquid, did not *want* to remain carbon dioxide, they wanted to change. And there came upon Pry a wholly unscientific conviction that the bubbles were trembling on the verge of combination, that they were waiting for some variation of the conditions to topple over, and turn steadily into sugar, not traces of sugar, but a strong and useful syrup. How to change the conditions, to do the necessary

## SUGAR IN THE AIR

thing, for which Zaareb's blue catalyst eased the way? Pry saw some of the complexities of the problem, and knew that he was going to grapple with them, that they would torture his mind, but that he was committed of his own volition, to an intellectual or psychical struggle, out of which only success would release him. The bubbles wandered upwards under his steady gaze.

## CHAPTER VI

### MARY TAKES PART

'THIS hole-in-the-corner way of going on is very unsatisfactory,' announced Mary, some weeks later.

Pry drew the bedroom chair a little nearer the gas fire, and restrained an impulse to prop up his legs against the other side of the mantelpiece — a position which would have warmed the calves of his legs but cut out all view of the fire from Mary, who was seated equally uncomfortably on another bedroom chair.

'It hasn't the warmth of a hole in the corner,' said Pry, 'and I don't like it any more than you ... but what else can we do?'

'Get a place of our own. It's absurd of you to go on like this, letting that wretched Mrs. Alison woman charge you extra for warming up your dinner in the evening and be for ever spying on us through key-holes. I'm sick of it all ...'

'We could go out for a walk,' said Pry, looking dismally at the rain which was streaming past the window.

'It's no use your changing the subject, we're going to have this out *now*. The trouble is you're afraid, frightened of responsibilities, and you don't *want* me to live with you ...'

'God!' said Pry. 'Must we go through all that again? Do try and be sensible; if we rent a house or

## SUGAR IN THE AIR

anything like that, and live decently together, you know someone will split and you'll lose your job. Then this atmospheric sugar racket will blow up, and we shall both be left with no money. They've got us all ways, and there's nothing for it but to go on sneaking what we can, like refugees.'

'But Ham, you know' (her pet name for Pry was Ham, short for Hamlet) 'we've been running that risk for years now . . .'

'I suppose you want to be married at a registry office, and have a nice little semi-detached house on mortgage, and a nice lot of new and nasty furniture on the hire-purchase system, and a nice little insurance policy on my life, and I'm to hang all that round my neck like a millstone for ever. Well, I won't do it, I just can't bring myself to do it.'

'Silly Ham, so frightened of bogies, can't you see that nothing can be so deadly and destructive as this interminable grey waste of talk?'

'Go on, go on, you'll be talking to me about *LOVE* next.'

'Not *LOVE*, Ham, and not houses, it's not those things I want . . .'

'You want a baby?'

'Yes, Ham. I want a baby.'

Pry was silent; they had so often discussed this before, but now Mary was asserting herself, she was forcing a decision, and he knew that it was right for her to do so. In the beginning, more than two years ago, they had not known the urgency with which a child can clamour to be conceived, their strife had been

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about whether they should, or should not live together — whether she should be his mistress — call it what you will. It was Mary who had settled that, and a force much greater than any one of their shifting emotions that had kept them together. That they should part had often been discussed; they had wrung its possibilities dry of all feeling in a thousand tearful and sarcastic rows; but they continued to live together, and Pry knew, without need of reasons that they were not going to stop. He hated the frustration of their intimacy almost as much as Mary wanted a child, but it was useless for Mary to taunt him with being afraid. He was unashamedly afraid. For he saw our social and political system as a terrible conspiracy whose aim in all things was the enslavement and conscription of the individual. For him, marriage, insurance, mortgage and debt were some of the means by which a man's love for his children is exploited. And he saw himself, with a child and its mother to house and feed, forced to cringe down within a militarized industrial system and stay where he was kicked. He would lose even the power to buy himself out for short spells by saving whilst he was in. He would be in for life. 'Happy go lightly' was not a way that Pry had ever known.

'If,' said Pry at last, 'if a juggler with plates can but juggle well enough with plates, the world will pay his wife behind his back.'

'You mean there is a chance your job will go on . . . ?'

'If we can make a ton or two of glucose out of carbonic acid before the next General Meeting of

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Hydro-Mechanical Constructions Ltd., yes! It's a fairy tale. But if I can juggle successfully with molecules of carbon dioxide and water, with rays of light and Zaareb's blue catalyst, a new industry will be started, there will be a fortune for somebody, and I shall be rewarded with the continuance of my job. I shall receive money, sufficient for our needs, for doing something in industry, that is *not* contemptible. That now, is our only chance and you must wait.'

'I don't like you, Ham, when you talk like that . . .'

'Maybe not, but put on your mackintosh and come with me to the works.'

They tramped through East Bullock's wet, deserted streets, and across the marshes to the factory. It was already nearly dark, and forlorn hootings from boats on the river came out of the grey mist and rain. The surprised watchman admitted them, and disturbed in his enjoyment of the *News of the World*, went off hastily on his neglected rounds. Pry and Mary hung their coats on the laboratory door and warmed themselves by an electric fire. The glassware and apparatus on the benches looked very strange on a Sunday afternoon, and an eerie quietness hung over the whole works.

Pry fetched a note-book from the safe and set it beside his slide rule on the laboratory bench.

'What are you going to do?' asked Mary.

'I am just going to go on with my work.' This, as Mary understood very well, was not the whole truth. He had brought her to see his laboratory, and to see him at work, 'showing off' was the phrase that sprang

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to her mind, and it gave her an extraordinary feeling of happiness that, after all this time, he should still want to show off before her. But there was more in it than that, nothing that Ham ever did was quite so simple or obvious. It might be a gesture of self-identification with the work, for Ham was capable of such things, or he might suddenly have got an idea and be whooping after it at once, unable to wait until the morning. She sat by the electric fire, and it was not long before Ham had forgotten her presence. He had one of the experimental quartz tubes going, with Zaareb's blue catalyst, and was irradiating it with the light from an arc lamp, which he first caused to pass through a colour-filter. At the end of an hour an alarm clock buzzed angrily, and he drew off the contents of the quartz tube into a bottle. Then he charged up the tube again with a fresh lot of catalyst and irradiated it again, this time with an imperceptibly different colour-filter. He was investigating the effect of altering the wave-length of the light.

When the third experiment was nearly completed there was a discreet knock at the door. The watchman thought perhaps the lady would like a cup of tea. Pry completed his experiment and sat with Mary by the fire.

‘Yes,’ he said, replying to a question that was intended to please him. ‘I suppose you could call it research.’

‘But isn’t it *slow* . . . what has all this told you?’

‘Nothing, in fact, except that these particular changes in the wave-length of the light do *not* increase

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the yield of sugar. The only importance of such negative results is that they clear the air, and we don't have to make these particular experiments again.'

He warmed his hands at the electric fire.

'One thing at least is certain: when a pound of glucose is burnt, as of course you *can* burn it, it turns into carbon dioxide and water, and in doing so gives out enough heat to boil about forty pounds of water. However it may be possible to make glucose again out of carbon dioxide and water, it is most certainly going to be necessary to restore to it an amount of energy, equivalent to the heat in about forty pounds of boiling water, and that's a good deal. There aren't many things left that I believe in, but I do still believe in the principle of conservation of energy.'

'But isn't light a form of energy?'

'Of course it is; and those bubbles are being subjected to a very strong light, but I don't care what kind of light it is, from ultra-violet to infra-pink, those bloody bubbles are not getting nearly enough *energy* stuffed into them to make any appreciable amount of glucose. Something quite powerful and obvious wants doing to those bubbles to push them over the line, something about as drastic as lighting a fire under them. And that's what *I* think about it, blue catalyst or no blue catalyst.'

'I do wish, Ham, that sometime or other you'd come down to earth and just tell me what a catalyst is? I've heard of catacombs and catapults and even cataclysms, but catalysts? Be human.'

## MARY TAKES PART

‘A catalyst is the thing you do modern chemistry with; you turn coal into petrol, soya beans into fittings for Ford cars, methylated spirits into india-rubber; practically anything into practically anything else; and always at the heart of the transmutation you find the same damned thing: a catalyst. Catalytic action is a mystery closely guarded by experts — like Zaareb — who don’t like you to talk about it. But I can give you a pretty fair idea. You remember the Rational Ramblers? (The Rational Ramblers was a hiking and discussion club to which they had both once belonged.) Well, you were attracted to the R.R. and so was I, for different reasons, and quite independently. We both entered into a feeble sort of association with the R.R., its aims and objects, but it was through that feeble association that you and I first met each other. We soon broke away from the R.R. and went hiking together on our own, with deplorable consequences. The R.R. catalysed our personal relations — took part in the reaction but doesn’t appear in the compound. Zaareb’s blue catalyst in these tubes does exactly the same thing for unattached molecules of carbon dioxide and water. The light is the aphrodisiac and the catalyst is the rendezvous. You get me?’

‘I think so,’ said Mary, ‘... it may be all right for molecules.’

They shut off the lights in the laboratory, and went into the office, where Pry put his note-book in the safe, trying the handle carefully afterwards to make sure it was locked. Mary smiled. ‘It is not an unnecessary precaution,’ said Pry grimly. The night watchman,

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the works cat rubbing at his legs, showed them off the premises. 'Anybody been around to-day?' asked Pry darkly. 'Not yet, eh? . . . well, good night.'

This time they did not venture over the sodden path across the marshes, but went the long way back to East Bullock, by the cinder track and the arterial road.

'About supper,' said Pry, as they reached the unlovely High Street. 'There's a wonderful choice, there'll be one half ounce each of cold mutton, one half of a slice of bread, one ball of butter the size of a farthing, one small jam tart and a glass of cold water, at Mrs. Alison's; there are machine-made pork pies and beer at the pubs if you like to jostle for them; and as you know there's the fried fish.'

'What's wrong with fried fish?'

'Nothing but the monotony; let's get!'

The cleanest of the three fried fish shops of East Bullock was crowded, but they found seats at one of the tables, and gave their order for two fourpenny pieces and threepenn'oth of chips; no coffee was obtainable so for drink they had two bottles of a cold and gaseous fizz, with a strongly synthetic taste, reminiscent of raisins. It did not mix well with the hot and greasy fish.

The couple who were seated at the other side of the table eyed them amusedly: the man, about the same age as Pry, was a rum-looking bird, he wore a very old jacket of good cut, a pea-green tie made of an odd piece of silk, and he had a peculiar mop of wiry black hair. The girl with him wore a green oilskin, and a kind of bonnet with flaps, of the same material. Might be

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anything, thought Pry, from a pavement artist to a professor, but most certainly not a workman of the district. The stranger returned Pry's discreet survey with a mocking and direct stare.

'Very good for the gizzard,' he said politely, referring to the fish.

'The last place in the world I should expect to meet an ornithologist,' countered Pry, making a wild shot in the dark.

They laughed, and the girl leant over the table quickly towards Mary. 'Very funny he should say that,' she said, her face all lit up with a sudden pleasure. 'We've been out on the marshes all day, spotting the birds that come up the river, how on earth did he know?'

'Oh! he's like that,' said Mary, hinting at undefinable psychic qualities.

'You are a watcher of birds . . . ah!' said Pry intently.

'Saw a couple of herons this afternoon, standing like rheumy sentinels in the mud near one of those queer old deserted farms, with a couple of trees, that you can still find about the marshes. Slow starters, herons, they've got no acceleration.' He moved his bent elbows slowly, imitating the motion of the birds.

'For long periods you watch birds, you permit nothing to distract you, you think of nothing else, you are that one thing only: a watcher of birds . . .?'

'Aye, feathery ones, and — them wot ain't got no fevvers,' he said, raising his eyebrows at the girl in green.

Pry did not smile, he looked pained.

## SUGAR IN THE AIR

'I am a stranger, you hide in defences. Yet I am not a stranger, no one is a stranger to him who watches birds. Only to watch birds . . . thinking at first only of birds, and then beyond thought . . . watcher and watched become one . . . Only to be that: a man who watches birds, what liberation! What power! What infinite happiness!'

The other looked at him strangely; queer, he thought, he looks intelligent enough, is this some sort of gag, or is he really a Yogi-Bogy? 'Oh! all right,' he said, 'for purposes of argument, I do watch birds, what about it?'

Pry's face filled with a very fair imitation of ecstasy. 'Ah! happy is this day. That I have met one, who knows how near is the lowest to the highest; a watcher of birds; one who is sometimes no less than that . . . to whom one experience is all experience . . . to whom one moment may be eternity . . . to whom renunciation is fulfilment, and fulfilment renunciation . . . Ah! that Life should stream without impediment of consciousness . . .'

'Look here, old man, just what is all this in aid of?'

'It is in aid of Life,' said Pry.

The wiry-haired one banged the table with his fists and leant back in his chair rocking with laughter.

'Contact!' said Pry. This was a man after his own heart.

They dropped the foolery and talked eagerly together: an honest and uncensored conversation touching that vast range of topics about which no candour is permitted in print: personalities, sex,

## MARY TAKES PART

religion, Imperialism, 'defence' forces, public morality, the taxes, the laws, unemployment, and the manipulations of finance. From generalities the talk shifted to the calorific value of different sorts of coal, for the ornithologist was not a professor, but one of the shift engineers at the East Bullock power station, and his name was Derek Watts. Pry and Watts were soon engaged in an exchange of technicalities, very interesting to them, but almost completely incomprehensible to both Mrs. Watts and to Mary, who found common ground in recollections of activities at Friends' House. Whenever the proprietor of the fish shop came and hovered near the table, suggesting that they were overstaying the welcome to which their purchases of fish and chips entitled them, they bought twopenny packets of damp biscuits, and so stayed on talking until the shop was closed. They went up the road together, only ceasing to talk when they reached Mrs. Alison's dingy but double-fronted residence.

To both parties this chance encounter seemed to have about it something of the miraculous, like finding a spring in a desert or folk of one's own civilization in an alien land. Mrs. Watts and Mary had exchanged addresses, and Watts had promised to show Pry over the power station.

Pry and Mary went up to their room, still laughing about the sense and nonsense they had talked and rejoicing that the Watts did not live far away. They pulled the bed across the room, to screen the hearthrug from the draught, and sat on the floor by the gas fire together. Presently they removed their clothes and sat

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naked in the red glow from the fire. Pry, in a dreamy mood of self-deception, and oblivious to the chills which crept over those parts of his body not directly exposed to the fire, felt that life had, after all, somewhere within it, just such a warm, simple and beautiful core. That God would protect his innocents. Idly, and lightly, he pressed Mary's nipples, as though they had been bell-pushes, and they laughed and drew close together.

'You know, Mary,' he said, 'I believe I feel happy. I've been watching birds — or jostling invisible molecules — it's all the same. I am surrendering myself to my work, and contentment in being alive has always come to me in proportion to the degree of my self-abandonment in what I am doing. I am sinking into my new work now, trying to make sugar from the air, and as I lose myself in that, all the difficulties of the future seem to recede; the dark shadows of tyranny, that I so much fear, cease to affect me; I am no longer troubled by our affairs; if I can go down and down, and sink myself utterly in my work now, I know that I shall succeed in it; and there will be money; it is certain that we shall have our child.'

Mary, leaning on his shoulder, had closed her eyes and apparently gone to sleep, 'But . . . it would be much more certain if . . .' she murmured.

An hour later they had gone to bed, and the room was dark. There was a movement in the bed and a certain secretive fumbling. Suddenly Mary's voice broke the silence, not loud, but with intensity. 'I *hate* these beastly *things*, these beastly cowardly *things*!'

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And in a little while, had Mrs. Alison been listening at the door, she might have overheard this very significant conversation:

‘No! No! we dare not . . .’

‘Yes, Ham, I tell you, Yes!’

## CHAPTER VII

### TRIGGER ACTION

ON December 15th, Mr. Duff MacDuff, sitting in his office at Agastral House, plotting some minor coup for the benefit of the Board of Directors at their next meeting, was interrupted and a little startled, as it was intended he should be, by the arrival of a special messenger, with an urgent and confidential report from Mr. Pry. The report was entitled 'Trigger Action' and read as follows:

Exploration of the effect of irradiation with light of different wave-lengths, using Dr. Zaareb's blue catalyst, has shown that green light, of wave length 5000 to 5500 Ångström units, other light being excluded, exerts a remarkable effect, comparable to trigger action, in promoting the synthesis of sugar by *low temperature heat*.

By the application of low temperature heat during irradiation with light of the above critical wave-length, I have succeeded in producing, by direct synthesis, a solution of sugar, containing 50,000 parts of sugar per million by weight.

It appears that practically the whole of the energy required for the formation of the sugar is derived from the heat, and that only a small amount of energy in the form of the green light is required to start the

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reaction. The light only exerts this trigger action when the blue catalyst is used.

In the first experiments which led to my discovery the tubes were heated by means of the laboratory electric fire. Hot water jackets have now been substituted.

Experiments are continuing, and the theory of trigger action must be rigorously investigated, since it is in direct opposition to the accepted views on the nature of photosynthesis. I have sent a copy of this report directly to Dr. Zaareb for his immediate consideration.

It may be said at once that if this discovery is fully confirmed and substantiated, it will give a new direction to our work, and render superfluous the whole of M. Cocaine's quartz tubing and mercury vapour lamps, as at present installed in the factory. The new synthesis requires only gas-filled electric lamps or daylight, and glass vessels.

I enclose a sample of the product, Ref. No. S.S.4572, containing 50,000 parts per million of sugar by weight.

The report was signed, with a strongly upward sloping signature, Charles Richard Pry.

Mr. MacDuff read this document; then he placed it squarely before him and read it again. As a matter of habit he drew two dumb-bells and a system of triangles on the margin, and underlined the signature and those bits of the wording where Pry seemed to be 'spreading himself'. From Cocaine he would have taken no notice

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whatever of such a report, but from Pry — confound him — it could be about as dangerous as a high explosive bomb. He moved rapidly into action.

‘Yes, Zaareb, here,’ came the sinewy voice of the Company’s Scientific Adviser, over the telephone: ‘No, you have not disturbed me, there is no need to be so solicitous, I am not busy and I am not unwell.’

Mr. MacDuff would greatly appreciate Dr. Zaareb’s opinion of Mr. Pry’s report.

‘Interesting; but as I told you I had great hopes of my blue catalyst. If what Pry says is true it will be particularly agreeable to me. Schumacher’s been taking up a lot of space in the *Zeitschrift* lately; but the man hasn’t a practical idea in his head; can’t find anything better to do than write yet another long paper on the cacodyls: they’ve been stinking to heaven for the past hundred and seventy years. We can’t publish of course, but it is pleasurable to know that we can still do a useful synthesis.’

MacDuff politely agreed that Schumacher could be up to no good, and assumed that cacodyls were something that professors naturally went in for. Very gently he pressed his inquiries:

‘I’d like to know, Dr. Zaareb, what ye think of the introduction of low temperature heat into your synthetic operations?’

‘That’s sound enough, he’ll probably find that 37 degrees Centigrade is the optimum temperature, amazing how important that particular temperature is in nature. But “Trigger Action” is amusing, I see no reason why that should happen; I think I am familiar

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with the literature, and there's nothing about it in the literature.'

'Then you don't think that our enterprising Mr. Pry with his "discovery" has exactly set the Thames on fire?'

'When these young men start telling me I've got to give immediate consideration to things in direct opposition etc. etc., I proceed with salutary deliberation. But there is such a thing as the luck of the amateur, and if Mr. Pry has done the half of what he says, make no mistake, it's a pretty fine feather in his cap. I shall be going to the works as usual next Wednesday, and then I shall be able to tell you what *has* happened.'

'I confess I had in mind, Dr. Zaareb, in view of our Board Meeting on Monday, that you might possibly have been able to have made it convenient to have gone before that. I should be pleased to put my car at your disposal. . . .'

Dr. Zaareb, past president of the Berzelius Society, author of Zaareb's *Chemistry of the Carbohydrates*, expert witness and an authority, was not making any special journey to East Bullock, because a Mr. Pry, who hadn't even a D.Sc., thought he had done something spectacular and been keeping it up his sleeve. This point of etiquette was a nuisance really, first because it was a fine morning, and secondly because the report very much intrigued him. The special request from the Managing Director of a £3,000,000 Company came opportunely.

Dr. Zaareb arrived at the works, very solid, and to all appearance in a thoroughly irritable mood. He took

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Pry's report, folded, out of his pocket and threw it down on the desk; then he went straight to Mr. Ackworth, and examined at length with him certain preparations of catalysts, that were being made purely in the interests of thoroughness and which had no bearing on Pry's report. Pry hovered about in the laboratory, finding excuses to stay there, and bursting with a desire to talk about his introduction of the low temperature heat. Zaareb took no notice of him whatever; and Pry at last, by way of saying 'Blast you!' as ambiguously as possible, took himself off to the new experimental gear which he had rigged up in the works, and he stayed there. But he did no work: the thought of Ackworth having all that opportunity of telling Zaareb the interesting bits about *his* discovery was too much for him. Plumox, who was stooping about the gear, the only workman that Pry trusted to be near when his experiments were made, understood the situation perfectly, but he had been too well drilled in the army during the 1914-18 war, to interfere or even appear aware of what was going on amongst those whom he regarded, quite simply, as officers. Without a word from Pry he was getting the gear ready for a demonstration.

At length Zaareb came into the works, not improved in temper because Pry had, so to speak, won the trick, and by an unexceptionable action forced Zaareb to come to him, instead of the other way round, as it should have been. Promptly surrendering the advantage, Pry went to meet him, and walked beside him towards the gear, as though this little exchange of feeling had never

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existed, as though it never could possibly exist, between chemists and engineers.

'Well, what is all the excitement about?' said Zaareb, grudgingly.

'It can be done with heat and not light as the main source of energy, it only needs a little light to start it off, the yield is . . .'

'I've read your report. Has Mr. Ackworth determined the sugar in your samples?'

'Yes,' said Pry humbly, and suddenly feeling completely indifferent to the whole business, 'he has.' For all the interest that was being taken he might have been found sneaking the petty cash, instead of producing, like a rabbit out of a hat, the very thing that they had scarcely dared hope to find. Day after day and night after night he had been working before he got his wonderful idea.

'What is this?' asked Zaareb, examining the gear.

'A glass water-jacket,' said Pry.

'Glass absorbs ultra-violet light.'

'I know, but the kind of light required goes straight through it, that's why I say quartz tubes are unnecessary.'

'But you ought to know that water absorbs the infrared rays.'

'Here are the absorption spectra of all the materials used,' said Pry, very patiently.

'Then how do you get your heat?'

'By connecting the water-jacket to the factory heating system,' tonelessly, as though that had not been another bright idea.

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Zaareb melted a little: 'You had better let me see a run.'

Very methodically Pry drew a record sheet from his pocket, filled in the date, wrote across the top 'Trial made in the presence of Dr. Zaareb', and entered up the particulars. The stop clock was started and the green light, the gas, and the hot water turned on simultaneously; this time the gas, moving up the heated tube, was no longer discernible as separate bubbles but only as a cloudy turbulence, the liquid was appreciably clearer at the top: under the influence of the light, the heat and the catalyst, much of the gas was obviously going into combination.

Dr. Zaareb sent Plumnox to fetch his laboratory coat, and then took the observations on the flow of the gas, whilst Pry and Ackworth looked after the temperatures and the measurements of light intensity. After an hour the alarm clock sounded and everything was shut off.

'If you don't mind,' said Pry, 'I should like you to see the analysis for sugar carried out.'

'I'm going to,' said Dr. Zaareb.

After separation from the greater part of the blue catalyst, the liquid was found to contain 51,300 parts per million of sugar. Pry, by boiling off the water from another portion, exhibited the dried sugar, like brown toffee, in the bottom of a dish. It was no longer sugar by inference, but sugar *de facto* and *in esse*.

Zaareb touched the stuff delicately with a finger, and equally delicately touched the finger with the tip of his tongue.

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'How do you know that radiation for one hour gives the maximum yield?' he said. 'Why not forty-five minutes or three and a quarter hours? Who said that that rate of flow of the gas is the best? Why should the temperature be fixed by what that of the hot-water system happens to be?'

'I propose to try all that. I was working here all the week-end getting things as far as they've got.'

'That was very meritorious of you, but at any rate you are now quite clear what you have to do, never vary more than one thing at a time; you have enough to keep you going until I come out next Wednesday.'

Pry had no intention of letting Dr. Zaareb rub him up the wrong way; Zaareb had knowledge, and he was not going to cut off the supply by bristling up whenever Zaareb got truculent. The only thing about all this psychological business (in other people) was that it was a damned nuisance. It wasted time.

'Shall be wanting another ten gallons of the blue catalyst,' he said; 'could you suggest to Mr. Ackworth some way of making it a bit more quickly and perhaps more cheaply . . .'

'Oh, that,' said Zaareb; 'give me a chemical catalogue.' They went back into the office and Zaareb began to rustle over the pages, testily, as though they got in his way.

Lying on the table was the folded copy of Pry's report which he had turned out of his pocket. It had been lying there for nearly two hours. Pry went to the door and looked out; the Belgian typist was struggling

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along with English at her usual pace, Cocaine and Pinks were in their office next door.

Zaareb found what he wanted and wrote some formulae on a slip of paper: it meant that half a ton of the blue catalyst could be made for about £5. 'You've made short work of that!' said Pry. Zaareb nodded and became several degrees more amiable:

'This thing's beginning to look very interesting.'

'Just a question of cost now, isn't it?'

'I'm not so sure, but it's obvious we can't go on buying compressed carbon dioxide in bottles, it's got to come from somewhere for practically nothing: there's the atmosphere of course, but there's only four parts in ten thousand of carbon dioxide in the air; or we could burn coke, but that's hardly practicable, scarcely enough difference anyway between the cost of coke and the value of sugar. We'll have to find some way over that, we've never before got near enough to synthesizing sugar, to make it worth my bothering about that. Where do you propose to get your light from — commercially?'

'Sunlight, I think, most of the time.'

'You see what that means?' Pry nodded. 'Well, you can be sure MacDuff doesn't, and the Board won't either, better break it gently.'

'So far we keep it a chemical curiosity?'

'In a way, yes, but it's a glittering fish for a company promoter, we've got to be very sure of our ground, but don't worry, they are going to listen to what I shall have to say. We've got farther in two months than Cocaine got in two years, and we're not going to be precipitate

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or have any more blunders . . . And I am not going to stand for any further interference from Cocaine or the Count.'

'The Count!'

'Klamac, ubiquitous Company promoter, in whose service Cocaine lost his arm, ten years ago, messing about with some substitute for fulminate of mercury . . . Klamac, who mesmerized our Board into purchasing what he calls the Cocaine process. If the Board still think they have anything to gain from Count Klamac and his victim, MacDuff is the man to disabuse them, and *I* shall take a very firm attitude. Had any trouble with Cocaine lately?'

'Well, I must say that for a raving inventor, he seems pretty tame to me. I've locked all the entrances to the works since I started the heat synthesis, and he's afraid to come near the lab. I've seen him just twice in his office — he says he's synthesizing ipecacuanha now, all the carbohydrates and proteins are finished. Looks like a paranoiac case to me, apparently harmless, but I don't trust him. That reminds me, you remember you took your copy of my report out of your pocket and left it on this table when you came in? It's been lying here all the time we have been in the works. . . .'

The blood went to Zaareb's face.

'I WILL NOT BE A PARTY TO THIS CHILDISH NONSENSE.'

'Perhaps it's all right,' said Pry, 'and it's my fault for not locking it in the safe, but I can't overlook the possibilities . . .'

## CHAPTER VIII

### REPERCUSSIONS

MR. DUFF MACDUFF, armed with Dr. Zaareb's confirmation of the news in Pry's report, had no need of his little giant-gooseberry-season coup to throw to the Board. He had real meat for them. And it had been *his* idea that they should retain Dr. Zaareb and take on Mr. Pry and Mr. Ackworth to work with him. For this he had been severely criticized, on the ground that it was an extravagance, when they had already Monsieur Cocaine. Now this substantial progress by the new team would be something of a personal triumph for Mr. MacDuff, something to which he could point in justification of his policy. He was dictating his adequately impressive Managing Director's report, when he received his copy of a letter that had already been circulated to all the other Directors. It was from the Count:

'To the Chairman and Directors  
of Hydro-Mechanical Constructions (Great Britain)  
Ltd.,  
'Gentlemen,

'I am given to understand that representations will be made to you from a certain quarter that the Cocaine Process has been superseded, and that there will be put before you a cock-and-bull story about Blue Catalysts and Low Temperature Heat, purporting to be supported by samples containing 50,000 parts of sugar.

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'In the interests of the Company I must expressly warn you against giving any credence whatever to this story. Solutions containing 50,000 and indeed any number of parts of sugar can be made by the Cocaine Process, but by no other means, as I have determined absolutely, in the most influential scientific circles.

'I gave my reluctant consent to the appointment of additional staff for the Company's works, only on the clear understanding that it would act under the instructions of M. Cocaine. I am informed that far from this being the case, attempts have even been made to exclude M. Cocaine from both the works and the laboratory, and that statements purporting to concern the process have been made without reference to him.

'I take the gravest possible view of the situation, for the delay which is being occasioned by this childish manœuvre is prejudicing my negotiations on the Continent.

'I hesitate to stress my right as Vendor to the Company, as I have always sought to influence its Policy towards a successful issue, but, if full restitution of his powers as Technical Adviser, Chief of Research, and Technical and Commercial Manager, is not made to M. Cocaine within seven days, I shall instruct my nominees as may appear to me proper in the circumstances.

'I am, Gentlemen, your obedient servant,  
'KLAMAC.'

Mr. MacDuff dug his pencil through the paper in underlining this ultimatum, and against the words

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'rights as Vendor to the Company' he drew an elaborate and terrible star. The accursed Count had sold the Cocaine pup to the Company for £200,000 in hard cash and £300,000 in fully paid up shares, and that he should now have the effrontery to claim rights *because he had done this*, to say what the Company should or should not do, was as delicious as it was ridiculous. But that did not make the letter any less dangerous; Mac-Duff knew his Board: completely at sea themselves about the whole business, without a single technical or commercial man amongst them, they would be afraid to disregard so emphatic a communication, and Klamac, who by sheer bluff and force of personality had forced them into embarking the Company's money on a scheme, which they could now see was pure optimism, still held a pathetic influence over them.

The whole extent of the Count's real power was this: with his block of vendor's shares he could combine with Kosoff, who held another block of vendor's shares (part of what he got for the rights in Kosoff's extruded houses), and Klamac and Kosoff together, with other shareholders that they would be cunning enough to influence, could defeat any motion at a General Meeting of the Company, and take control.

Fortunately, Klamac and Kosoff hated each other like poison, each having a fairly complete understanding of the other, but the Board would not believe that, and there was always a danger of a *rapprochement*. It was unlikely that Gog and Magog would join forces over a mere matter of Cocaine, as Kosoff had no interest in the man, and for Klamac he had served his

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purpose. Klamac had paid Cocaine £1000 for the alleged process which he sold to the Company for £500,000, and got him a job with the Company at £1000 a year. He had done that much for him; surely it could not matter to Klamac whether Cocaine continued to get his £1000 a year or not. He was merely using Cocaine's grievance as a pretext for appearing once more before the Board like a face at the window, and renewing his spell over their rabbity little minds. Blast those fools at the works that they had let this information leak out! But it was Zaareb who had left the report on the desk, and no satisfaction was to be had in trying to blow up Zaareb about that. Anyway it would do no good.

MacDuff saw that he had got to smash Klamac's influence with the Board, that he must force them to ignore Klamac's letter. It was dangerous, for one never knew what Klamac had up his sleeve, but the risk had got to be taken. Not only the continuance of Zaareb, Pry and Company, who were now doing fine at the works, but his own position as Managing Director, with its very respectable fees and emoluments, hung in the balance. Mr. Duff MacDuff did not hesitate about what he was going to do, though it might imperil everything, he was going out to smash the influence of the Count.

The first thing to do was to take Dr. Zaareb out to lunch. Dr. Zaareb, being one of the leading scientists of his time, had a certain status and prestige in the eyes of the Board, not so much as a minor politician or a Knight, but rather more perhaps than a foreign Count.

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Dr. Zaareb, who loved to be near when portentous happenings were in the air, and who had not lost his indignation that Cocaine should cross his path, acceded readily to the request. Dr. Zaareb agreed with Mr. MacDuff that the pilfering of confidential information from the works had got to be stopped. But this was not quite all, for whether by reason of what was said at that lunch, or as the result of an independent decision on Zaareb's part, MacDuff received in nice time for the Board Meeting a very terse and deliberately phrased letter from Dr. Zaareb. It offered the Board a choice of alternatives: to retain M. Cocaine at the works, or to retain Dr. Zaareb. They could choose one or the other but not both.

Mr. MacDuff, armed first with a sealed and certified bottle of syrup containing 50,000 parts per million of synthetic sugar by weight, the solid achievement of Dr. Zaareb and his assistants; secondly, with Count Klamac's letter in evidence of a deplorable conspiracy of obstruction and espionage; and, thirdly, with Dr. Zaareb's unequivocal ultimatum, went to the Board Meeting, and what happened there profoundly modified the subsequent course of events.

Meanwhile, at the works, the excitement over Pry's report of December 15th had quickly died down; since Zaareb's visit nothing more had been heard of it, and Pry had almost persuaded himself that it had not after all been read by the rival conspirators. Three days made a good deal of difference in one's point of view: it was symptomatic of this changed view point that the

## REPERCUSSIONS

strength of the synthetic sugar solutions was no longer written in parts per million, but as a simple percentage by weight. Five per cent was not after all a very high concentration and the trouble now was in getting through the great number of chemical estimations and routine experiments on their way to increasing the strength. Both Ackworth and Pry needed help.

‘Trouble is,’ said Pry, ‘we can’t trust the men we’ve got here, except Plumox, and we can’t actually sack them, because they are supposed to be Cocaine’s personal staff, and he’s to be given no excuse for not doing whatever it is he’s supposed to be doing. There’s six of them, what can we put them on to?’

Ackworth reflected: ‘Might clean t’windows — there’s twelve hundred and eighty panes in t’windows, and they’re mucky . . .’

The six men were provided with one ladder and two pails, and set to work round the factory on the outside, cleaning all the windows, commencing with those of M. Cocaine’s office.

Then Ackworth, as Head Chemist, wrote to the Society of Organic Chemists for a Junior Analyst at £2 a week, and Pry rang up the Head of the Engineering Department of a Polytechnic for an intelligent youth to assist him with the experimental gear. They took on a new lab. boy, and a skilled fitter on the recommendations of Pry’s new friend Watts, at the power station. Thus was the nucleus of a new staff recruited, whilst the old, like demons that howled without, cleaned the windows.

But the next memorandum from Mr. D. MacDuff,

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Managing Director, to Mr. C. R. Pry, Resident Engineer, introduced further and more drastic changes. M. Cocaine's interpreter was to be dismissed immediately (thus rendering M. Cocaine practically inarticulate) and Mr. Pry was to engage an English typist for himself. Further, a record was to be kept of the times when M. Cocaine entered and left the factory, and if he absented himself during working hours, Mr. MacDuff was to be informed immediately. Also if M. Cocaine entered Messrs. Pry and Ackworth's 'Private' office or their laboratory again, on any pretext, Mr. MacDuff was likewise to be informed *instantly*.

'Better bait the place with a loomp of cheese,' was Ackworth's comment when Pry showed him the memorandum.

Pry hesitated, and then, tapping politely on Cocaine's door, walked in without waiting for an invitation. Mr. Pinks, who was weighing something on a balance, looked up in confusion, and Cocaine himself turned round and stared blankly. It had become an unwritten rule that neither party should enter the other's quarters, and this intrusion took them aback. Pry presented to Cocaine the memorandum he had received from Mr. MacDuff. Cocaine read it contemptuously, shrugged his shoulders and handed it back.

'It is of no importance; I do not take the orders from Mr. MacDuff, it is I who give the orders . . . it is I, ha! ha! ha! very funny is it not, it is not Mr. MacDuff who is COCAINE; it is not you, it is *I* who am Cocaine.' M. Cocaine accompanied this outburst with idiotic nervous laughter.

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Pry took back the paper. 'This is not my quarrel, Mr. Cocaine, but I am warning you of my instructions. They are going to be carried out.' Pry saw in Cocaine the fanatic, but for whose imagination — and perhaps but for whose amputated limb — this exploit of making sugar from the air would never have begun; Pry was not setting mantraps for anybody.

'MacDuff, I spit at him; if I lift my little finger he is gone, pish! he is nothing. He is too stupid; he and the Board, ha! it is made of wood. They say "Ahem", "Ahaw", they behave like pigs . . . it is well. All of a sudden I shall speak, and then . . .'

Pry looked about the office, it had been turned into a sort of laboratory, and on all the shelves of the book-cases, the table, and the benches by the walls were stacked innumerable little bottles of chemicals, as though the man had ordered a little of everything, with the notion that if one tried all possible mixtures of known things something new would be sure to result. 'How are you getting on?' he asked Cocaine, ingenuously.

'Ha! that would be very interesting, would it not? It is not so very easy, ha! ha! to work the Cocaine process. You are a how you say: dirty, perfidious humbug, is it not?' He held up a little stoppered tube. 'Here is a little secret, you would like to have it? You would like to make ipecacuanha as good as Cocaine, ha? to write a little report to Mister MacDuff, very good, eh?'

Pry shot out his hand and grasped the phial.

'Ah! skit!' he said. He put it down on the table and walked out of the office.

## SUGAR IN THE AIR

The Belgain typist was glad enough to leave, with a little bonus of two weeks' unearned money, and she assured Pry that it was not she who had 'borrowed' the report that all the fuss was about.

'What report?' said Pry quickly.

Oh, Monsieur Cocaine had told her about it, she had typed a long letter, it was none of her business. So that was that. Pry rang up a secretarial college and arranged for three typists to be sent along for inspection.

At nine o'clock the following morning there were already five of them waiting, and others arrived at intervals of ten minutes or a quarter of an hour all day. There were typists who brought their mothers, typists in fur coats, obliging typists, prim typists, dowdy typists, superior typists, and typists who had no intention of doing any typing at all. Pry selected an intelligent, modest girl, with a fresh complexion; tried her ability to take down a letter at average speed and transcribe it accurately; and engaged her.

Miss Rosewood was installed at a desk by the telephone exchange as Pry's 'confidential secretary', with instructions to cover up the work in her machine when Cocaine and Pinks were about, and to use legal carbon paper, which does not provide a stencil copy of the original. It was also a part of her duties to record the times whenever M. Cocaine entered or left the premises. By means of a certain charm, unfailing politeness and the necessary dash of masculinity, Pry secured Miss Rosewood's loyalty. He appeared to need her help and he trusted her; and she was too inexperienced to analyse this flattery.

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With the new staff, work on the experimental gear proceeded more quickly, and it was soon found that by prolonging the time that the tubes were exposed to heat and light, and by making certain alterations in the temperature and the amount of catalyst used, the strength of the sugar solution produced could be increased from 5 to as much as 25 per cent. And this was the limit, for although practically the whole of the oxygen derived from the splitting up of the carbon dioxide escaped as a gas, sufficient was retained by the blue catalyst to 'poison' it slowly, and when 25 per cent of sugar had been produced it was no longer effective.

But already another and a much more formidable difficulty had appeared: the synthetic syrup did not contain only sugar, and by no means all the sugar was glucose. Zaareb and Ackworth had begun to analyse the product and had already found in it seven different kinds of sugar, a gummy substance more complex than sugar, and a whole string of other substances intermediate between carbonic acid and the simple sugars, some of which would be decidedly poisonous or unpleasant as constituents of food. Ackworth, who had something of a gift for digging information out of the tombs of the chemical literature, prepared a large chart of substances known or suspected to be chemically intermediate between carbonic acid and sugar. It looked like something out of a new education nursery for children, showing all the possible ways of arranging the letters C, O and H in lots of from three to twelve at a time, and it was extraordinarily complicated. It hung on the office wall, to impress MacDuff, to draw priceless remarks from

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Dr. Zaareb, and if Cocaine ever caught sight of it, to mystify him completely. Quite a number of the things represented on the chart were undoubtedly present in the synthetic syrup.

It was nearly a fortnight before Cocaine did anything that was worth reporting to Mr. MacDuff. Then he was away from the works for three consecutive days, and on his return, leaning tragically on the arm of Mr. Pinks, he entered Pry and Ackworth's 'Private' office to say sarcastically that he had been sick. Both occurrences were reported to Mr. MacDuff, and once more the Chrysler crunched on the cinder track. 'I have been waiting for this,' said MacDuff to Pry, after an interview in the office next door that had been emphatic on one side and shrill on the other. 'It will do very nicely. Carry on.'

'Wonder what that means?' said Pry, as he and Ackworth returned to their work. Ackworth clicked his thumbs expressively.

Two days later a warning call came from Zaareb over the telephone: 'Mr. MacDuff will be at the works again this afternoon. He is not coming to eat cherries. Good-bye.'

At three o'clock Pry was busy with Plummox, his arms deep in a jar of synthetic syrup, the best they had yet made, fishing for sediment in the bottom. The factory bell rang; Pry did not look up, for the boy had been stationed near the door with instructions to open it immediately. Five minutes passed.

'I think that was Mr. MacDuff, sir,' said Plummox reproachfully.

'I know,' Pry said. 'Give me the weight of this jar.'

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He knew by a deductive process, quite uncanny, the exact location of Mr. MacDuff, at any moment since he had entered the building.

Mr. MacDuff appeared in the doorway of the laboratory. Pry looked up with a fair simulation of surprise.

'Can you interrupt your experiments, Mr. Pry, and come with me? I have a matter of some importance to attend to, and I require you as a witness.' Pry washed the syrup off his arms and followed Mr. MacDuff into the office.

'It has been decided by the Board, that in view of his physical disability and unfortunate state of health, Monsieur Cocaine is to have twelve months' holiday, commencing to-day, and in order that his rest may be complete, he is not to enter these works after this evening. Will you please have his car brought from the garage and then follow me.'

They went into Cocaine's office, and Pinks, now white as a sheet, was told to wait outside. Cocaine shrank from MacDuff, as from something utterly bestial and vile.

'At the request of the Chairman and Board of Directors of the Company, I hand you this letter in person. Please read it now.'

Cocaine's face, already drawn with neurasthenia, became deathlike as he read the letter; he perceived at once that it spelt his absolute dismissal; this *holiday* was a trick, a wedge driven through his contract; his job at £1000 a year, his process, the Cocaine Process, fame and glory, were being torn from him. He took it well. His hand clenched the table and he looked as though

## SUGAR IN THE AIR

something had indeed been torn from his bowels. But he spoke without indignity:

‘My arm, my health, it does not matter . . . it is nothing . . . my work, my experiments, I must continue my experiments . . .’

‘The Board of this Company are unwilling that you should make such a sacrifice.’ The sarcasm in MacDuff’s voice was very heavy. ‘I am not here to add anything to the letter you have received. You will leave these works in half an hour.’

‘But it is not possible . . . my papers . . . my chemicals . . .’

‘In half an hour, Monsieur Cocaine. You may take all, or as many as you see fit, of *your* chemicals; you will receive assistance in packing them. Your experiments — you may regard as suspended — indefinitely. I have no more to say.’

MacDuff returned to Pry’s office. ‘Are the services of Monsieur Cocaine’s “left hand” of any use to you?’

‘No,’ said Pry.

‘Then ring for him, and dismiss him at once in my presence, giving him one month’s salary.’

Pry did so, using the fewest possible words. Mr. Pinks’s cockiness and insolence of manner served him in poor stead at this blow, he snivelled about his wife and children, and tears streamed from his eyes. This exhibition lost him what little sympathy he might otherwise have had from both MacDuff and Pry.

When Pinks had been conducted out of the office, Pry turned to MacDuff: ‘I presume that we can now discontinue cleaning the windows . . .’

## R E P E R C U S S I O N S

‘Sack the lot, give them what money you think right, and get them off the place to-night. Good afternoon, Mr. Pry.’

Pry had Cocaine’s boxes of chemicals put in the waiting Ford; M. Cocaine and Mr. Pinks followed them meekly enough, and left the works for the last time. Plummox, standing at the corner of the yard, threw back his head, crowing derisively after them as the car disappeared.

‘Cut that!’ said Pry.

Back in Cocaine’s office Ackworth was already examining the remaining chemicals and going through the desk; from amongst the litter that had been left behind in the haste of departure, he held up a bunch of keys. ‘See these?’ he said. They were duplicate keys of the drawers in Pry’s desk and of his office safe.

C H A P T E R I X

O U T O F T H E S M O K E

‘AND are you still going on living in this beastly lodging-house with a decayed clergyman?’ Mary was very persistent.

‘Oh, damn the lodging, what does it matter?’

‘It matters a good deal to me.’

‘It’s true we’ve got our sugar — jars and jars of it — and months before the specified time. But what of that? Think of the snags ahead: the syrup is still too weak, it’s almost certainly poisonous, and it costs — I tremble to think what it costs — at least fifty times as much as good wholesome golden syrup. We are still buying gas compressed in bottles — and it’s only because there is a little carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, that we talk at all about sugar from the air. The gas is in the air all right . . .!’

‘But having got so far, and with Cocaine out of your way . . .?’

‘The conditions of work are a bit more normal — that’s all. And with what we’ve done already we’re no longer out raking for the moon. We may be in at the beginning of something that will change the rhythm of civilization as profoundly as the advent of steam power or the internal combustion engine. It’s a great responsibility and I’m scared.’

‘You and your rhythms of civilization! How would you like my responsibility, with forty children to teach

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all day and every day, moulding their plastic souls and all that . . .?

Pry kept quiet, for Mary did not seem to understand. She did not realize the intensity of the spell which the thing had cast on him, as upon everybody who had had anything to do with it — it was like a new power worrying to be born . . . the winning of food from the air.

‘I’m sorry, Ham, but what I mean is: how can it help you to go on living in discomfort in these horrible lodgings; you know very well, inside you, that you’re going to take all the responsibility you can get, and that your job *is* going on.’

‘Oh, all right, get *Dalton’s Weekly*, let’s start tramping the streets of East Bullock, house-hunting . . .’

‘You mean that? You’re not going to do it against your will and then turn round on me?’

‘Oh, come on, it’s Saturday, and as good a time as any; if we don’t go now, I shall have changed my mind six times before you go back to-morrow night.’

They went out and stood looking about them. No amount of familiarity made East Bullock appear a desirable place in which to make a home. To the south, towards the river, were roads leading to the power station and to a large mass-production factory making television sets, and these roads were lined with the real slums of the future, mere terraced coops for the cheap labour of the television factory, with no pretence at providing space or any pleasantness of aspect. So far some of the brickwork had not been up long enough to get really dirty, and that was all that could be said for

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the area. To the north, the ramifications of 'Sunnylands' defied exploration.

The house-agent was very obliging: a four-seater saloon car would be at their service to show them all the seven types of the 'Bijou Palace Homes of Sunnylands'. There were built-in clothes cupboards, dressers, geysers and coal boxes, separate lavatories and heated towel rails, and the walls could be distempered any colour to taste. There would be no need (and indeed no room) for any furniture except a bed and a couple of camp stools. No road-making charges or legal costs; only £25 down and from 17s. 6d. a week for life, and a modern, labour-saving, sun-trapping, four-roomed bijou palace was theirs, at once, irrevocably theirs. 'What,' said Pry, 'about a flat, or some ordinary rooms?'

The house-agent had some, it was true, but he was sure the lady would not like them; old-fashioned places, with no modern conveniences, whilst in Sunnylands . . .

They began, outside the town, in the direction of the works. A waste land that agriculture had deserted but that industry had not yet occupied. Pylons straddled high-tension wires over it confusedly; by the river was a vast rubbish dump, partly overgrown with grass; the 'marshes' were low, flat fields, their weeds limp and blackened by frost, receding forsakenly into the river mist. They inspected little dirty houses along the road, old, dark and insanitary; not, it is true, one half so wretched as the houses of Sunnylands would be after a hundred years, if they stayed up so long, but dreary, unutterably dreary.

Snoot House remained to be seen. The house-agent

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had thrown in the keys, saying they could of course look at *that*. It stood out on the marshes, surrounded by a high wire fence, and had been unoccupied for many years. It was unique in having a bit of an elm tree and a few bushes growing near it, at what had once been the junction of two lanes. 'Too big!' said Pry and Mary simultaneously. But they pushed aside a rusted iron gate and went into the garden. There was a broken outbuilding that had once been a stable, and Snoot House itself stood four-square, with a door in the middle and half the windows boarded up like black eyes. Inside it was dark, portions of the floor had decayed, and the remaining wall-paper and decorations were as tawdry as were the galleries of the Crystal Palace, to whose era they belonged. It smelt as old houses always smell, but as the gas was disconnected there was no smell of gas, and the rooms were large, each of them nearly as large as the whole interior of one of the Sunnylands houses, with the partitions knocked down. The rooms had wide marble fireplaces, and the ceilings were not eight but nearly eleven feet from the floor. As they walked about the rooms, discovering that the structural defects were merely local and not dangerous, a certain liking for Snoot House grew upon Mary and Pry. When it was too dark to poke about further they set off back to the house-agent's, already determined to take the ground floor, basement and garden on lease.

They trespassed across some fields and got out on the river wall, intending to make their way back round the television factory. There was a certain beauty in the river scene, with the seventeenth-century silhouette of

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housetops on the other side, the black boats moving on the sluggish water, and the chimneys of the power stations and cement works poking narrowly into the sky. The chimneys of the East Bullock power station were discharging an immense volume of smoke.

‘Can’t they wait?’ exclaimed Pry to nobody in particular.

‘What did you say?’ queried Mary, who was leaning on his arm.

‘The smoke from East Bullock, they’re not allowed to blow off smoke like that, it’s illegal under the Smoke Abatement Acts, so they wait till it’s dark.’

They watched the black smoke diffusing gently into the darkening sky.

‘They’ve got grit arrestors, sulphur washers and the Lord knows what else in the stacks, so during the day there’s only a little drift of steam and the . . .’

‘Oh! my God!’ said Pry, gripping Mary’s arm and suddenly standing stock still.

‘The what?’ said Mary gently.

‘The bloody CO<sub>2</sub> . . . CO<sub>2</sub>, tons of it every hour, going already washed and clean up those stacks; Lord, what a blind fool I’ve been.’

‘Something to do with your work . . .?’

‘Something, I should damn well say it is, an inexhaustible supply of clean carbon dioxide, only two hundred yards from the works, and now just going off to waste . . . I should say it is . . .’

Pry began to stride along the river wall, Mary half running by his side . . . ‘What’s the idea? Where are you off to now?’

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‘To Watts, that shock-headed, blasphemous Watts, shift engineer.’

Watts came to the door in his slippers and a coat of Grenfell cloth intended for the chase, which he had bought sometime for a Continental holiday. He pushed the door wide open, bowed as usual with mock ceremony, and called over his shoulder: ‘Quince! here’s Ham and Mary.’ His house was warm and fresh and clean, with everything new and colourful. With a vast and loving expenditure of invention they had made the interior of the constricted little Sunnylands house very attractive. Nothing could have been in greater contrast with the dingy and sour bigness of the old house that Pry and Mary were going to take on the marshes. Snoot House would never be new again, and it would never be really clean, nor was any money going to be spent on its furnishing — to send a pantechnicon round to collect unwanted furniture from their relations, was Pry’s idea of setting up home. All this, he thought, these pleasant colours and new things are a form of rejoicing, Watts and Quince are married, they’ve done all the things they’re socially expected to do, despite all Watts’s talk, and this is the flowering of their happiness, just as contemporary custard-powder romanticism, assisted by the Happy Home and Hobby Housekeeping journals, indicates it ought to flower. Pry and Watts had discussed nearly everything, with the liveliest sarcasm and ruthlessness, but there were two things they never discussed: they were Watts’s little house and Pry’s habit of self pity.

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A pleasant odour of vanilla suffused Watts's house, for Quince had been cooking cakes, to some new recipe, on the electric stove. By having tea very late the Watts had found a way to save on the housekeeping: after late tea no supper is necessary. Pry and Mary were just in time for the meal.

'Know anything about palingenesis?' said Pry, by way of setting the subject for the evening, and hoping to get even with Watts for his 'dialectical materialism', which had caught him, Pry, lacking at their last encounter.

'Word of twelve letters, beginning with P and ending with S, meaning?'

'Something to do with the Crusades,' ventured Quince.

'Meaning evocation of the ghost of a thing out of its ashes, a notion of the eighteenth-century astrologers, see Ebenezer Sibly,' said Watts, promptly returning the ball.

'Damn,' said Pry.

Quince's face lit up: 'You've never told me about that.'

Watts tousled her hair; 'It would be wasted on you; now Herr Ham, here; if I tell him about it, he'll use it to pull some other poor mutt's leg, the next time he goes slumming in a fried fish shop . . .'

'Bah!' said Pry, 'your advantage. Spout.'

'Here, Messieurs and Mesdames, I have a rose, flower, leaves and root. I commence by burning it in a crucible, not one particle of the ash must escape. I distil the ashes with water in an alembic. I collect the

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essential fluid in a phial, and seal it with a membrane from the desiccated backside of a goat. I place it in a water-bath, maintained at the temperature of blood, for nine months, then I filter it through diatomaceous earth, and redistil it to remove the oily elements. Then I seal the vital essence in a large glass globe. I take it into a darkened room and hold it for one moment over the flame of a candle. The complete ghost of the flower rises into the globe, with stem, leaves and roots perfect as in life, and in their original colours. I remove it from the flame, and the ghost of the flower disappears, as suddenly as it had arisen. Palingenesis, Herr Ham, n'est ce pas?

'Must have been mugging it up,' said Pry, ungraciously. 'And you think it's all rot?'

'Anyway,' said Pry later, 'the old astrologers made a mistake, they let all the substance of the flower go off in the smoke. My idea is to collect the *smoke* and bring the flower back out of the smoke.'

'Oh, yeah! Useful invention, your palingenesis, you'd better come over to the power station as a consultant, and show us how to turn our flue gases back into prehistoric plants.'

'And that's not so balmy, either,' said Pry. 'Will you give me some of your gas?'

'All you like to take away.'

'Seriously, you'd let me have a bottle of the stuff?'

'Och aye, and if you want something to warm it up with, you can have our cooling water. We don't give away electricity, but any other of our products you can have: there's three hundred tons of flue gases, with

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twelve and a half per cent of carbon dioxide going up the chimney every hour, and about nine thousand tons of warm water going into the river. Help yourself.'

'I'll bring a cylinder over on Monday; got a compressor?'

'Said Hudibras, I smell a rat. What are you really up to?'

'Palingenesis, of course . . .'

'Do we let him make a fortune, pinching our flue gas? Come over on Monday, anyway, and I'll show you round; you damned chemists must play.'

Before Dr. Zaareb next came to the works, Pry had got his cylinder of flue gas from the power station, and had already made an experimental batch of synthetic syrup from it. It had a most extraordinary aromatic odour and was red in colour.

'Interesting,' said Dr. Zaareb.

'I've changed the source of supply of the gas,' said Pry quietly.

'On whose instructions?'

'My own, just come and look here. . . .' He led the way to the window and pointed to the stack chimney of the power station, 'Experimental Series K, Batch 30, Gas *ex* chimney!'

Zaareb smiled. 'That's not exactly an original discovery: it's well known that flue gases contain CO<sub>2</sub>, you know.'

Pry did not say: 'Since it is so damned well known, why didn't you suggest it months ago?' He was beginning to learn some of the elementary principles of tact.

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'I had of course been thinking of that; but now you've already got the stuff, it must be tried out properly, there's no reason to suppose there will not be differences.'

'Well,' said Pry, 'it's bright red for a start, and it stinks the place out . . . but there's twenty-four point three per cent of "sugars" in it.'

Zaareb bent over the jar of stuff, considering it: 'Schumacher couldn't have done that, these *soi-disant* synthetic chemists never get any practical ideas, yards and yards of redundant stuff they write, I pride myself on this. My research students do manage to get ideas. I've always said you don't want a lot of money or apparatus or academic qualifications, if you've got any ideas. I can always tell a good man, when he can see things that are immediately in front of his nose, and can make up his own apparatus with sealing wax and tobacco tins and bits of string. How did you get your gas?'

'Made friends with the shift engineer, nice chap called Watts, he's a Marxist; knows all about palinogenesis and collects birds' eggs.'

'I've no time for these young men who think they can reform the world.'

'No, it's perfect already, but the gas is useful, hm?'

'Have you told MacDuff about this latest development?'

'Not yet, and I thought it would be best if you put it up to him, we shall want a man to bring the gases from the chimney into our plant, an agreement will have to be negotiated, and it needs the weight of your influence.'

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'Quite right,' said Dr. Zaareb; 'and MacDuff's the man to see this thing through, what do you think of him?'

'I'm darned glad to be on his side of the fence — shouldn't care to have to stand up against him . . .'

'Exactly.'

In this exchange with Zaareb, for all that Zaareb refused to put it in so many words, Pry received the highest praise he had ever got for a technical achievement in his whole life. And over that jar of red synthetic syrup the whole relationship between the young man and the older had changed. Because Pry was showing himself resourceful, and because his ideas were good ideas, Dr. Zaareb was admitting him, by a perceptible degree towards the status of a collaborator, a fellow worker, had even spoken of personalities with him, and at once within himself, Pry renounced all bargaining or competition with Zaareb for credit and praise. It would no longer be: I have done this and this, and he, I grudgingly admit, has done that and that; it would be what *we* have done, and their achievements should be put forward with all the weight and influence of Dr. Zaareb's name.

'Been able to get this stuff analysed yet?' asked Zaareb. 'Do you know what the colour is?'

'It will take weeks, but it looks like complications from the carbon monoxide and traces of sulphur left in the flue gas. There are cyanides present, which would be pretty deadly.'

They went back into the laboratory and Ackworth joined them, discussing ways and means. The main

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thing would be to remove the impurities from the flue gas, or to prevent them from forming anything poisonous in the syrup. Also to separate the sugar from the remaining blue catalyst and other substances, and in this lurked all manner of unknown difficulties, for the sugar was not of a kind that could be purified by simply crystallizing it and pouring the rest away.

When Zaareb conveyed the news to MacDuff that gentleman was already very well satisfied with the course of events. Count Klamac's move to frighten the Board, and get them to reverse his, MacDuff's, policy, had failed. He had countered it, not by conciliation, but by a bold demand for the absolute expulsion of Cocaine, and Cocaine was gone. It was true the Company were still paying him £1000 a year, and with excruciating cleverness the Board had avoided offending the Count, by just giving a sick man a holiday, an action to which he could take no reasonable exception. But Cocaine was gone. It was rather an extravagant way of getting rid of him, but it worked. And that £1000 a year could be worried out later. As he had anticipated, the danger of a Kosoff-Klamac *bloc* had not materialized, and now Count Klamac had gone back to the Continent, where, Mr. Duff MacDuff fervently hoped, some of the Central European police might be interested in him.

MacDuff had shown the Board that Klamac was after all only a face at the window, and in delivering them from their bogey, he had strengthened his own influence, and shown them once again, that the only way to make

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things easy for themselves was to leave them to *him*. Now Zaareb came along with this news of a link-up with the local power station, and a practical source of raw material for nothing, or next to nothing. His policy was being justified again and again by RESULTS. He was getting results, amazing results, and in a direction where the rest of the Board could neither criticize nor follow him. In the past the synthetic sugar scheme had been just a South Sea Bubble, a boom flotation, a company promoter's stunt, which the other Directors — by profession, stockjobbers, politicians, and company promoters themselves — could manipulate as well or better than he. But now that there was a germ of real business, when Big Business could be fastened on to the back of something that actually crawled, the Board were out of their depth. Mr. Duff MacDuff would stand alone, the master of a mystery they did not understand.

The prospects suited Mr. MacDuff very well. But unfortunately he could not get far on mere reports of astonishing technical progress. Such reports were too much in the company promoters' own coin, and the Board would have all too many precedents for the mental reservation that they weren't true. Supported by expert opinions, yes; good enough to put before the public without danger of misrepresentation, certainly, but between ourselves . . . well, I mean to say! What Mr. MacDuff needed were contracts, options, agency agreements — these things would be real. Or the nearest approach to anything real that the Board would ever wish to see. One could hardly expect them to go to a

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works and look at jars of syrup. But to get contracts it would be necessary to make approaches, and to make approaches it would be necessary to have samples. Mr. MacDuff reached for the telephone.

'Just how soon, Mr. Pry, will you be able to have ready one hundred gallons of satisfactory synthetic syrup for commercial samples?'

This Mr. Pry was mumbling something about the stuff being poisonous, about purification and concentration, about not knowing this thing and the next thing. These technical people always saw difficulties, mustn't let them flounder about, the time had come to put on pressure.

'If I asked you for ten gallons only, would that remove these difficulties?'

Pry feared it wouldn't.

'Then I'll put it to you another way; just how soon *can* your difficulties be disposed of; ten years shall we say — or could you commit yourself, with additional facilities, to manage it in four or five?'

Mr. Pry, grinning at the other end of the line, thought they might have made some sort of progress in five or six weeks. . . .

'Very well, then, I will hold up my negotiations for that period, which you will kindly regard as a maximum.' With these people it paid to be obtuse. Set them a time limit, put them on their mettle, let them know you mean business . . . 'And, Mr. Pry, have you any suitable bottles to put the samples in?'

Mr. Pry was saying something about getting the stuff first before bothering about bottles to put it in.

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‘You’ll obtain, Mr. Pry, let me see — one thousand bottles — one thousand quart bottles, with the necessary sawdust and wooden boxes to pack them in, and you will take steps to ensure that there will be no breakages in transit.’

That was the way to do it; get a thousand bottles standing waiting at the works, with their mouths open; it ought to have a moral effect, and what was the cost of a thousand bottles, anyway. And just to let them see that he really did mean business, Mr. MacDuff issued these instructions, as instructions are issued in a properly departmentalized modern concern: that is to say three times. First he rang up Mr. Pry and told him, then he wrote him a letter about it, then he went out to East Bullock by car and told him to his face. It would do no harm for these experimentalists to taste a little efficiency.

Pry rubbed his hands. The stuff would be ready just so soon as they could find means of making it, no sooner or later, but Zaareb had done well in getting Mr. MacDuff so hot on the scent, and as the clergymen say, our desires become easier of fulfilment when we share them with others. In the meantime perhaps something could be staged, just to show how willingly he entered into the reckless spirit of Mr. MacDuff’s instructions.

When that gentleman next came to the works, he found Mr. Pry supervising an entirely new series of experiments in one of the bays so far void of machinery. Plummox, standing on the upper rungs of a ladder, was dropping boxes containing glass bottles on to the con-

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crete floor. The lab. boy was busy opening the damaged boxes, and Pry with a pad of graph paper was correlating heights of fall with the condition of the contents. A considerable number of bottles had been smashed in this process and were lying in pools of syrup.

'Would you mind telling me,' said MacDuff, who had been standing stroking his chin, 'what is the object of all this?'

'Just taking steps to ensure,' replied Pry, without a ghost of a smile and continuing to make notes, 'that the samples of syrup, when we have got them, will be suitably packed to avoid breakages in transit. Impact experiments.'

'A better way,' said Mr. MacDuff, 'is to do it like this.' He picked up one of the boxes, which was fairly heavy, and pitched it fifty yards down the shop.

## CHAPTER X

### MEN FROM THE CITY

'I'd like to fix up, if it's all the same to you, the date of my summer holidays.'

Pry looked up with a start. Ackworth was standing before him, with a certain nervousness of manner, as one who has at last screwed up courage to ask a favour of a boss. Pry felt embarrassed, for although he had gently pushed Ackworth into a subordinate position, and rarely discussed anything with him except the immediate job in hand, he had persuaded himself that this did not in any way interfere with a spirit of liberty, equality and fraternity. Now Ackworth had quietly cut through that little humbug and was treating him as a boss, no better and no different from another.

'All right,' said Pry, smiling, 'but this is only the 4th of February; aren't you quite likely to change your mind between now and the summer?'

Ackworth was going on a motor charabanc tour, with his girl, round Cornwall in July, and he wanted to be sure of the reservations in time.

'Any reason to suppose that we are going to be here in July.'

Ackworth saw no reason why not, they'd been there three months already, he was entitled to three months' notice anyway, and time soon goes.

'How can you think about holidays, with MacDuff's thousand bottles waiting to be filled?'

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'Aye, let them worry about that as gets paid for worrying, I don't.'

Pry saw that his policy of never chatting with Ackworth had been carried too far, he drove Ackworth as hard as he drove himself, and that, with the long hours of overtime, and the disappointment because they were making no real progress with purifying the syrup, was causing disaffection amongst the team.

'Look here,' said Pry, 'the job's getting stale, go up to Town, to the Patent Office, do a bit of abstracting, and see if you can pick up any ideas. Stay there for four days, wherever you like, and I'll charge it to the firm. You'll dig up the information if anybody can — and give Alicia my kind regards.'

'Fine!' said Ackworth. 'Mind if I go to-night?'

'Let's just have a last look at the job before you go.'

'You see,' said Ackworth, going over the flasks on his laboratory bench, 'we can get rid of the red colour easy enough by adding a spot of soda carb., but that doesn't take out the impurity, just changes it to a leuco form. We can clarify the stuff by boiling it with charcoal, and the smell comes off at the same time, but the cyanide stays put, and so do most of the intermediates. It would take five years to sort it all out.'

Pry scratched his head, this was the job MacDuff wanted done in five weeks and they'd been a fortnight at it already.

'How much cyanide is there in it?'

'They went through the figures together. 'It's precious little,' said Pry.

'Practically damn all,' said Ackworth.

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‘Then why not leave it in?’

‘Call it a flavouring, a taste of peach kernels . . .’

‘Call it a preservative . . .’

‘So much for that. And about the smell?’

‘Boil it off—and go on boiling off the water till we’ve got a good strong syrup, sixty per cent.’

‘Throw in some charcoal to clarify it . . .?’

‘Chuck in some charcoal.’

‘And neutralize it with lime . . .?’

‘Dope it with lime.’

‘And let it go, whatever it is?’

‘Just let it go.’

MacDuff wanted results, he should have them. When all those things had been done to the syrup, heaven alone would know what was in it, besides sugar, but there should be nothing really poisonous, and there *might* even be something beneficial. As nobody appeared to know for what purpose the samples were going to be tried, it should do to go on with.

‘I say, old man . . . I don’t think I’ll go up to Town to-night, I’d like to see what happens with this first . . . better leave the abstracts for a bit.’

‘Well,’ said Pry, ‘it’s not really the sort of job to leave to a junior — have a Gold Flake.’ They smoked the weed of reconciliation. The decision to evade their difficulties, rather than attempt to solve them against time, brought great relief of mind.

A day or two later, when all the syrup in hand, had been doctored and boiled up, Pry hired a lorry, had it loaded with all their empty steel gas cylinders, and went over to the power station to fill up at the

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chimney. Ackworth and Pry sat on the tailboard of the lorry, and the sun came out of its wintry obscurity to shine beneficently on those two pioneers of a new industry.

The power station superintendent watched the operation of 'bleeding' his stack. Watts, who was very popular at the station, had interceded with him, Mr. MacDuff had taken him to lunch at the Savoy Grill, and negotiations were already started for the supply of the flue gas through a main across the marshes, a development that would bring the station a small but unanticipated revenue. The superintendent was very willing to provide this 'bulk sample' and had drafted men on to the job of drawing it off. Further, he had suggested the time of day for taking the supply when the sulphur washers were working most efficiently, and the gases were most free from impurities.

'Going to make mineral waters?' he asked Pry. 'I have heard that quite a number of the mineral water manufacturers are now using flue gas for pumping into their beverages. I am sure you will find our gas very satisfactory.'

With the promise of a further load of flue gas if they wanted it, Pry and Ackworth returned to the works. They could now make and doctor up a hundred gallons of crude synthetic syrup in a week, if that should be necessary. The construction and working of the experimental gear had been greatly simplified and its capacity increased. Dr. Zaareb approved the crude syrup, said that MacDuff would just have to make do with it, if he was in such a hurry, insisted that its

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analysis and further work on it must proceed quietly and systematically, and added that nothing is eaten as hot as it's cooked. The pace of the work eased a little, and both Ackworth and Pry were able to make a break, which they felt they had fairly earned. Ackworth went off to Town, nominally abstracting literature, and Pry on his return moved into Snoot House.

The agents had only agreed to make habitable and partly redecorate the bottom half of Snoot House, if Pry would take a tenancy of it for three years. Somehow he had come to do this; the argument with Mary on the one side and the agent on the other had been likely to go on for ever; but suddenly he had said, 'Give me the damned agreement', and dismissing all considerations of prudence, he had signed it. Snoot House was theirs for three years.

Pry and Mary left Mrs. Alison's lodgings without notice, and with an exchange of some very unpleasant remarks on both sides. They moved for the first time into a home of their own. Watts and Quince brought some primroses, which they had gathered on a ramble somewhere in Kent, and these stood in a blue bowl by the window.

So soon as the moving men had gone and the furniture had been disposed about the place and the fire lighted, Pry sat down to the table with a mass of papers from the works, and took no further notice of his new surroundings. Mary had bought a gay print overall for the occasion and wore it as she pottered about the house. Pry saw it from the corner of his eye and shuddered inwardly. After an hour or two she came

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and stood beside him, with her hand on his shoulder. 'Ham,' she said, 'are you ready for a meal?' He pushed his papers away, clearing a half of the table. With the meal appeared one or two bright and fancy dishes amongst the plain white crockery; their value was at the most half a crown, but Pry, whose instinct was to touch wood all the time, observed them with a positive agony of spirit. He said little during the meal, and that only about the cost of collecting the furniture from their relations, and of the carpet and the curtains they had had to buy. Immediately they had finished he piled up the dishes, removed the cloth and returned to his papers. Mary went into the kitchen to wash up.

Some time later, Pry looked up and was rather surprised that Mary was not in the room. He made his way by the garden into the kitchen, where he found her, crying her heart out, beside a dead fire.

'Oh, Christ,' he said, as he stood and stared at her.

Mary turned up a face runnelled with tears, her hair wildly dishevelled, and burst forth at him: 'You spoil everything; you think only of yourself; and I thought we were going to be so happy. I made the meal for you — our first meal together in our own home — and you haven't time to notice. You haven't time to notice! Go away, go AWAY. Don't stand staring at me. You miserable, selfish PIG.'

Pry shrugged his shoulders; some fear of making himself ridiculous prevented him from attempting to mollify the distraught Mary. He went back to his papers, more disturbed than he would permit himself to acknowledge, for the thought of Mary grizzling

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away in the kitchen was like something drilling into the nerves of his stomach. He could not continue with his work. He gave it up and sat over the fire, gloomily smoking cigarette after cigarette.

His resentment fomented and reached a livid intensity, for the papers on which he had the whim to work, on that particular day, concerned the samples of the new sugar that would soon be going out to the ends of the earth. Out of the labour of my brain, out of the force of my will, he had been telling himself — conveniently forgetting the other people who had participated — out of my strength, goeth forth this sweetness. Intoxicated with this feeling, he had paid little attention to any sentiments about setting up a home, they seemed to him trifling, petty and silly beside an emotion amounting almost to joy, that the stuff at last made, was about to embark on its travels, that a new industry was born. All this immensity of feeling was suddenly punctured, soured and turned to suds by Mary's wretched, cheap, little outbreak.

Now Pry saw his hasty doctoring of the product as a shabby thing. He had been all cock-a-whoop about an achievement that was not sound. To send out the crude syrup in its present condition might only be to court disaster. Death and disease might follow its incautious application and MacDuff would not issue an adequate warning. At best it could only be found comparable to an impure and crude molasses, and for all that it cost to make, of negligible value in commerce. Scientific workers would expose it, and the Company would not survive such a set-back; all would be lost.

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It was in a chastened mood that Pry discussed the samples with Dr. Zaareb the next day. He showed him the long list of people to whom they were to be sent, the key to the first 'splashing' of the new wonder product 'SUNSAP', the first food from the air.

'You seem unnecessarily worried,' said Dr. Zaareb. 'Where or to whom the samples are sent does not concern me, it is not a scientific matter. And it does not concern you either. You must learn not to undertake tasks out of school. Leave these matters to those who are competent to deal with them, in this instance to Mr. MacDuff.'

'But is it safe — what are people going to be told about the stuff?'

'That again does not concern you, that is for me to decide.'

Pry thought what a fool he had been not to realize that Dr. Zaareb would already have formulated a proper description of the stuff, that he would be guiding MacDuff about what it was safe to say. In this once again Pry was quite wrong, Dr. Zaareb had not yet done anything of the kind, and Pry's anxiety was a timely, but unacknowledged reminder.

'I shall not permit my name to be associated with any extravagant statements, the composition of the stuff so far as it is known, must be stated, and what is not known must also be stated — at the same time there's no need to go about crying stinking fish. Now what I want to see is not what you are leaving in the syrup, but what you are boiling off, that also may be quite important.'

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Zaareb worked in the laboratory with this fluid, distilling it, separating it into various fractions, applying to each of them delicate chemical tests. Pry and Ackworth watched and assisted, rather as medical students watch a famous surgeon. In Zaareb's way of handling chemical glassware, of dropping liquids on to filters, and of reading instruments there was finesse. The grosser operations in the works could wait when Dr. Zaareb was about. At times, as on this day, when there was something interesting to do in the laboratory, Zaareb brought his lunch with him, and ate it in the office with Ackworth and Pry; but he did not, like Ackworth and Pry, bring sandwiches and a thermos flask; it would be a staff of French bread, some slices of salami or smoked salmon, a bottle of wine, and a pear, which he would peel with a silver knife.

Over lunch the job in hand could sometimes be informally mentioned, touched on lightly and dismissed, but only a very little at a time could be mooted on these privileged occasions.

'We shall soon have to buy some white rats,' ventured Pry.

'Or rabbits,' said Zaareb, seeing the connection instantly; 'why your special preference for rats?'

'They're cheap, and besides they're the proper things to have. Can't run a food factory without white rats, its unconventional.'

'Have you ever done any blood tests?' Zaareb turned to Ackworth, after a mouthful of salami. Ackworth had not exactly done any tests, but he had 'done' biochemistry for his degree and was quite confident.

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'No doubt,' said Zaareb.

'You really want,' continued Pry, 'a female rat-herd to go with the rats, someone you can call "Our Biologist" and dress up in a white coat. White rats and white coats go together. Biologically tested and produced under conditions of absolute purity. It impresses visitors, and they think the rats appreciate a lady attendant.'

'You are rather inclined to ridicule a technique you do not understand.'

'I don't understand. You forget I once turned sawdust into breakfast food. Five rats per hundred tons we reckoned to use on that. We had the whole outfit.'

'It might not be a bad idea, all the same, to get the syrup tried on a few rats or rabbits, before we go too far.'

Pry at once followed up the advantage. 'In fact I think we might start on mice, and work up through guinea pigs, rats, rabbits, dogs, pigs, kangaroos and small elephants, *before* we offer the stuff to the "Baby Food" merchants.'

'That's a matter for MacDuff, you know . . .'

'It wouldn't be beyond MacDuff to buy a complete menagerie, if you say it's necessary.'

'It isn't,' said Zaareb, 'but speaking of kangaroos, it was Griffenheimer who used to tell a story . . .'

The sample bottles of crude syrup, ready packed, stood in a great heap at the works and no final instructions came from MacDuff about sending them away. Things were quiet and the team continued the slow working out of the analysis of the product and by-

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products. 'We've been left alone,' said Pry, 'for nearly a fortnight. I wonder what has happened, perhaps Kosoff's Hydro-Constructs have got a big order, to rebuild Leeds, or something like that; funny we hear so little of the Company's real business.'

'Lulls are notoriously prone to precede storms,' said Zaareb, and in this he was right.

On February 21 Mr. MacDuff arrived without warning at the works, and brought with him two visitors. One a tall, dynamic-looking man, completely bald, his entire face and scalp very hard and highly polished, as by half a century of sin. The other, of the same age, but shorter and of the shape that a sack of meal might take after long reposing in a chair; he also was bald, but pink where the other was hard, and with a little trappist-like fringe of white hair, which gave him an air of diffusive benevolence, belied by his eyes. 'This is Mr. Pry,' said MacDuff, aside to these gentlemen. 'Mr. Pry, let me introduce you: Mr. Ketch (indicating the tall man) and Mr. Leary (the shorter). These gentlemen are officially associated with our Company and you may answer all their questions without reserve.'

The visitors looked steadily at Mr. Pry, as though that were one of the things they had come to the works to do, and so intense was their scrutiny that Pry was immediately apprehensive of danger. On the whim of such men the tenure of his job might depend. They asked to be shown the plant.

Pry conducted them into B Bay, and stood as nearly in the military position of attention as he permitted

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himself to stand for anything or anybody, which was very little different from his usual bearing. There, he thought, is the plant in my charge, there is nothing I am ashamed of, if these swine from the City of London are dissatisfied they can pay me three months' salary and I will go. Something of these thoughts was reflected on his face, for he made no special effort to control his expression. *He* did not play poker with finance and other people's lives.

Mr. Leary gave him a slimy smile: 'We have not come to criticize, Mr. Pry, but to obtain certain information.'

'Thank you,' said Pry.

A very small portion of B Bay was occupied by the experimental gear, roughly constructed of timber, with tanks, large glass tubes, pumps and iron piping, from which arose, somewhat like large sunflower heads, the dials of measuring instruments. All the rest of B Bay was filled with the batteries of Cocaine quartz tubes, zigzagging to the roof, with their banks of mercury vapour lights.

'I take it that this plant,' said Mr. Leary, indicating the experimental gear, 'has no value.'

'It has a certain interest,' said Pry. He did not add that it was the first apparatus yet constructed by Man that would make food out of the atmosphere.

'But it has no *commercial* value? You *must* appreciate the difference between tangible and intangible assets.'

'A definitely intangible asset,' Pry assented.

'And all this other plant will have to be written off?'

The vision of Mr. Leary sitting somewhere in the

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City of London, invoking the devil with actuarial incantations, and 'writing off' a mile and half of quartz tubing into the void, fascinated Pry. The evocation of the ghost of things out of their ashes, the humble alchemy of palingenesis, was nothing to it.

'At what figure does this plant stand on the balance sheet, Mr. MacDuff?'

'One hundred thousand pounds.'

'What value would you, Mr. Pry, as a chemical engineer, put on the part of it that could be utilized in a reconstituted productive plant?'

'About four thousand pounds.'

'Better write it all off,' said Mr. Leary.

Pry removed the lid of a large stoneware jar which contained some of the synthetic syrup, bleached and deodorized. Neither of the visitors showed any inclination to look at the stuff, so he put the lid back on again.

'I am given to understand,' pursued Mr. Leary, 'that in addition to the new capital charge for the production plant, there will be additional supply service charges?'

Pry considered this for some seconds, before a possible meaning of it might have occurred to him. 'Ah, you mean a pipe for the flue gas from the power station? Yes, we shall need that.'

Mr. Ketch leant stiffly towards him, patiently calling him to order. 'You do not seem to appreciate, Mr. Pry, that in the administration of a business such details are irrelevant; it does not matter whether the commodity marketed is sugar, or tramcar services, or

## MEN FROM THE CITY

sealing wax, or even money itself. The administrative machinery with which we have to deal remains the same and must be clearly differentiated from the operative or executive machinery . . .’ Except that he did not look so intelligent, Mr. Ketch might have been a High Court Judge, patiently explaining to a witness some principle of the law.

‘One more question, Mr. Pry; you cannot of course give an estimate of the potential demand for the new product, or produce figures for the anticipated gross profits on trading for any specified period, but you are prepared to say that the new commodity has a wide field of application?’

Pry felt that these questions had nothing to do with him, and glanced towards MacDuff, who was standing rather apart from the group, as though seeking permission to answer them. ‘Very wide indeed,’ he said.

‘And you consider that the process, though far enough developed to enable you to make samples, is still in its experimental stages?’

‘Yes,’ said Pry, conscious that all his replies were curiously flat and lacking in pomposity.

‘Thank you, that will be all.’

Pry returned to his office to continue his work, figuring out by how many times the surfaces in his experimental gear would have to be multiplied in a plant for production. He had not been there long when the door was pushed open and Mr. Leary entered, followed rather conspiratorily by Mr. Ketch. They drew up chairs to the other side of the desk and sat down. MacDuff was not with them.

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'We shall only disturb you for a few minutes,' said Mr. Leary, with a smile that was really quite affable, 'but we could not help noticing a certain restraint, a natural restraint, on your part, in answering our questions in the presence of a gentleman who is now remaining, for the moment, outside. Do you feel sure in your own mind that this synthetic syrup can be made commercially and that it has a great future?'

Pry took this to be a straight question, on his reply to which much might depend. He told them what had been done. Said that he thought the difficulties before them could be overcome. Told them that the direct production of food from solar energy and the waste gases and waste heat from power stations was a development so significant that he could scarcely begin to visualize its possibilities. They had the monopoly of inventions that, properly exploited, would lead to the establishment of a vast new industry in every industrial country in the world. The technical basis was absolutely sound, but they must begin cautiously, with a small productive plant, feeling their way until they knew more about the product.

'That is fairly spoken,' said Mr. Leary; 'now we will leave you to continue your work.'

## CHAPTER XI

## A FULL STOP

'Is there some place here where we can speak privately?' said Zaareb, some days later. He had placed his umbrella, his Homburg hat, and the leather case which contained his lunch on the top of the safe with more than usual deliberation. Pry led the way into Cocaine's old office, which was not then in use, and shut the door. 'It's all up,' thought Pry.

Zaareb looked at him, and then said simply: 'MacDuff has resigned.'

Pry said nothing. It was as though they were motor-ing through a wild country, a long way from anywhere, and the engine had just dropped out of the car.

'What happens now?' he asked at last. 'Is the whole thing bust, do we just go home . . . ?'

'Not at the moment. I shall have to do a little more work and so will you; we are going to manage between us. I have written to the Chairman of the Board about you.'

'And MacDuff?'

'The Board have called his bluff. He threatened to resign at the end of his contract, unless the Board did as he told them about Kosoff Constructions, and unless he got more money — an involved business, he has been speaking very plainly to the Board for a long time, and now he has overreached himself. It is quite definite.'

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Pry whistled; he knew nothing about the Kosoff Constructions, but that any man should want more than £5,000 a year, seemed to him as incredible as that MacDuff should be allowed to go. The big, swash-buckling MacDuff, with the power to push men about and get things done, and at the very time when his policy was crowned with success, the splendid achievement of getting together people, and driving them on, till they had done what was wanted — made sugar from the air! And now, at the very time they most needed him, to start up manufacture, put the stuff on the market and make it go! Pry did not appreciate the Godlike irrationality of Big Business, he knew nothing of the motives which actuated such mighty abstract entities as Hydro-Mechanical Constructions Ltd. He attempted to measure them with too petty a scale.

‘And the new Managing Director?’

‘They have had five Managing Directors already, they are not going to have another. There’s no statutory obligation, you know. A public Limited Company must have a Secretary, and a Board of Directors, but they are not obliged to have anyone to manage the business. Brigadier-General Sunderland Thump remains as Secretary.’

‘Why?’

‘Come,’ said Zaareb, ‘let us not waste breath.’

One of the fractions of the stuff boiled off in concentrating the crude syrup was proving fairly rich in aldehydes, substances like formalin, which, besides being very useful as gargles and preservatives, are used in making bakelite and other plastic materials. If there

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were sufficient of these by-products they could be extracted and sold, and might easily cover the whole cost of concentrating the syrup.

'A letter from the Company?' said Mary, bringing in the post to Pry, with his early morning cup of tea. Mary had to get up at seven, in order to be at her school in the East End by nine; and Pry, who had only ten minutes' walk across the marshes, stayed in bed until the last possible moment, which he had found to be half-past eight. Pry sat up quickly in bed, and opened the letter.

'They want me to go over to the other factory, at Bringham South, to-day, to receive certain important directions from Mr. MacDuff. I shall now see something of the Kosoff Houses. I've waited a long time for that pleasure, which only shows . . .'

'Goes to show,' said Mary. Pry jumped out of bed.

Bringham, on the South Circular Road, was one of the new industrial areas on the brickly peninsula or spur of Greater London which extended unbroken, into the slopes of the North Downs. It had something of the architectural pretensions of Colorado, in the years immediately following the gold rush. Some manufacturers of nationally advertised commodities had, it is true, given their works false frontages, with columns and entablatures modelled on the temples of Egypt, and surmounted with skysigns. A landmark in the area was a gigantic set of false teeth, worked in neon tubing, and nearly as large as a bus, which opened

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and shut incessantly in grim and awful perfection. But most of the factories, off the main road, were groups of steel-framed buildings, with asbestos roofs and cheap brick walls, wired off in reservations of lorry-rutted land. Of such a kind were the Bingham works of Hydro-Mechanical Constructions Ltd.

Pry made his way across the claim towards the buildings. As he did so he looked about him, taking in what he saw. Stacks of iron pipes lay rusting in muddy pools; an old lorry was overturned on its side; there were heaps of broken concrete; and in one place, a great pile of telephone booths, cast in the semi-transparent material which MacDuff had shown him when he first joined the Company, lay like the wreckage of an exhibition. But the most interesting thing was a transparent dwelling house, similar in shape and arrangement to those of Sunnylands, but evidently cast in one piece. A wedge, comprising a portion of the upper floor and the roof, had fallen away, and lay as it had fallen on the ground. Steel shuttering was piled against one side of this ruin, and from the other two large iron mains ran across the ground to the largest of the buildings, in which was dimly to be seen massive rusted machinery, with elevators and pug mills. Obviously an abandoned experiment.

Pry found a door in one of the buildings with a board marked: ENQUIRIES; went in, and explained to a pimply girl in a time box that he had an appointment with Mr. MacDuff.

Mr. MacDuff was removing books from an expanding bookcase in his office and putting them into a box

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with newspaper. He knocked the dust off his sleeve, extended a warm and muscular hand, and sat down at his desk. 'Well, Pry,' he said, 'you have heard?'

'And I am very sorry, Mr. MacDuff.' Something of the electrical charge had gone out of Mr. MacDuff's personality; his clothes had lost something of their line; the unapproachable Managing Director had subsided into a big Scotch engineer.

'Thank ye,' said Mr. MacDuff. 'But things are looking up in the naval dockyards, and it becomes necessary for me to transfer my attentions to them.' He sat pensively tapping his desk for a few moments with a folded copy of *The Times*, then he unfolded the paper, turned it so that a particular column was outwards, and handed it to Pry: 'Joe MacDuff, you've heard of Joe MacDuff, that's my son . . . heavy-weight champion of the R.A.F.'

'The Joe MacDuff?' said Pry, embarrassed, and doing his best. It was inadequate, but he cared nothing for athletics, had never before heard of Joe MacDuff, and felt only indifference towards the R.A.F.

MacDuff beamed, punched the paper affectionately, and put it away. Then he kicked three times on the wooden partitioning of the office. Miss Willoughby came in, looking sad, almost tearful: 'Yes, Mr. MacDuff?'

'Bring me those files to discuss with Mr. Pry, and . . . Alice, I say, fetch me a bottle of Perrier — a big bottle — *you* know.'

Miss Willoughby staggered in with the files. They stood nearly two feet high on the desk, stiff blue

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folders, with patent celluloid tabs, each folder containing an inch or more of compressed correspondence.

'All these files, and about another two hundred-weight outside, will be formally delivered over to you in a few days; you can then refer to them — in fact you will have to read them. I am now only going to give you a very brief idea of their contents, and show you where to find what you will require. You can read French, German and Spanish, of course; how is your Russian?'

'It couldn't possibly be worse,' said Pry.

'Hal! never mind, you can send anything you like to Flowerdews — send the lot if you like. Now first to acquaint you with the marketing arrangements, the position *vis-à-vis* the Foreign Licensees . . . pardon, what did you say?'

'I thought perhaps you would tell me how the whole thing started, but I'm sorry to interrupt.'

MacDuff smiled and leant back indulgently in his chair: 'It started in the lounge of the Hôtel Constantinople, when a certain Count Dostojny Klamac introduced himself to Mr. Usidlenie Kosoff, of whom you may have heard. With the assistance of Mr. Kosoff, Klamac contrived to sell the Cocaine process to this Company, he is the vendor. You will never know the whole story; I doubt if there is any man alive who knows it all, certainly I do not. But I am glad that you have caused me to refer at once to Klamac, for I warn you, Mr. Pry, he is a dangerous man, with whom you may have to contend. His nationality is uncertain, but he is known to be an agent of the Wegsucher, he is

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a personal attaché of Prince Saturnino, and in this country he has influence with Lord Turps.'

'My God,' said Pry, trying to look very grave.

'But you will not be far wrong,' continued Mr. Mac-Duff, 'if you picture Count Klamac as a sort of entrepreneur, working of necessity under cover, a man whose business is not women, but obscure inventors. He picks them up, makes them into what he wants, and keeps them until they can be used. He travels about Europe with a portfolio of schemes, working the most exclusive hotels. He is utterly unscrupulous. No one knows where he ran across Cocaine, but it is certain that he kept him in an apartment at Brussels, that he turned his head with promises, inspired in him hallucinations of greatness — you have read the Secret Book. Cocaine you may regard as the innocent victim of Klamac; he made him his fanatic; COCAINE the Chemist above all chemists, the greatest inventor in the world. Then he used him. At a time when there were new flotations every day for synthetic products: synthetic petrol, synthetic rubber, synthetic fertilizers, synthetic silk, synthetic wool, Klamac had his dazzling scheme — at last, synthetic food. He had everything: a patent (of sorts), a secret process, a secret book, a plausible paranoiac inventor, a mysterious laboratory abroad. Then he found Kosoff, on the Board of a company to whom he had sold Kosoff's Constructions for a cool million pounds, his co-directors still the men that he had gathered about him at the time of the original promotion, little more than his own nominees, and, for reasons we will not go into now, he had them already in a panic to

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'extend the Company's activities'. Kosoff and Klamac, birds of a feather, ready enough to fly at each other's wattles like game-cocks, got together with a new Eldorado to exploit. You will learn, Pry, before you are my age, that such men as comprise the Board of this Company, who have no roots in anything that is real, cannot resist promises of great profits, they have no foundations from which to differentiate between sane and insane. Klamac was even able to persuade them that there is some natural connection between moulding houses with soluble sand and extracting sugar from the atmosphere, and of this they are even yet convinced. It is a Walpurgis night, Pry, that you are about to enter, and your difficulty, and in this I mean no disrespect to you, will be just to keep sane. Take all you can get from them, put it in the bank, and keep sane.'

Mr. MacDuff, who had delivered all this with great emphasis, mopped his forehead, and sipped his Perrier. 'Now we must come down to business. You may be called upon to deal, very shortly, with the Licensees, and before you can understand the commitments with them you must be informed about the operations of the Paul, Peterson Developments Co. Ltd. At the time when the late Sir Decimal Floss was Chairman of this Company, and I assure you, long before I had anything to do with it, Messrs. Paul, Peterson, who have since moved to Chicago, were appointed, on the advice of Klamac, General Managers. General Managers, that is, of the Cocaine Synthetics. They were also given the contract for erecting the plant, which they did in consultation with Monsieur Cocaine. It may surprise

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you to know that that glory plant ye have at East Bullock was to produce, according to M. Cocaine, ten thousand tons of sugar per year. It was erected in a great hurry, since, again on the representations of Klamac, the Board believed that every week's delay meant a loss of the profit on two hundred tons of sugar. It cost this Company, one way and another, nearly two hundred and fifty thousand pounds. So much for Messrs. Paul, Peterson as contractors. As General Managers their first function was to approve their own work as contractors, which in the circumstances was not difficult, and their second function was to make the selling arrangements for the contractual output of ten thousand tons a year.'

'Ah!' said Pry, 'and they did that?'

'They enlisted the aid, on terms, of Count Klamac, who represented the Company on the Continent. He negotiated long-term concessions and licences in a dozen European countries. According to the terms of these agreements, two thousand tons a year of the output is reserved for France, two thousand tons for Italy, one thousand for Poland, one thousand for Czechoslovakia, and so on. The position regarding the Krausmann Aktiengesellschaft . . .'

'Excuse me,' said Mr. MacDuff. They had been interrupted by an impatient clump on the office door. Without waiting for an invitation a heavy-faced man pushed the door open and looked round it. He had a carbuncle as big as a teacup above his left eye, and a great area of his scalp was indecently naked with alopecia.

'Those kerbs aren't ready, sir, they can't be got orf,

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they'll have to be seen to. . . .' There was an insolent emphasis on the 'sir'.

'Well, see that they *are* ready. I'm engaged this afternoon.'

The man slammed the door to, behind him.

'Our Works Manager, Mr. Cloacher, . . . as I was saying, the Krausmann Aktiengesellschaft . . .' Mr. MacDuff worked on, stopping only to sip the Perrier from time to time, over the details of all the agreements. He might have been dictating a report to a stenographer and it was very, very long. Pry could only grasp a fraction of it. 'All these agreements,' said MacDuff, at last, 'were negotiated by Messrs. Paul, Peterson, on the strength of two reports which Klamac obtained from the Instituto Chimico Sappristo, and from Professor Thaumager of Budapest. A sum equivalent to seven hundred pounds sterling was paid for these two reports, and they were supported by samples alleged to have been made by the Cocaine Process in Brussels.'

Pry dug his fingers into his hair: 'But surely there have been other tests?'

'Plenty, Mr. Pry, plenty, but that came later, when the East Bullock factory had been erected. The agents were not so foolish as to commit themselves to *buy* any of the stuff until they had submitted it to the most elaborate and exhaustive tests. All last year and part of the year before that M. Cocaine was on his own at the works doing nothing but make samples for tests. You will find the results in files Nos. 537 to 576. They are worse than deplorable, and it was not until these damnable reports began to come in from every country

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in Europe, and I had joined the Board of this Company, that any of the conspirators were exposed. The stuff that Cocaine was making was then independently analysed for the first time, on my instructions. It was found to be little better than dirty water, it was infected with numerous organisms, contained amounts of chemical substances dangerous to health, and a very small quantity indeed of sugar, which was not produced synthetically.'

'Corn syrup?'

'That is not unlikely. When this imposture was discovered, I persuaded the Board, despite a vigorous opposition from certain quarters, that the entire process should be investigated under the direction of Dr. Zaareb, whose integrity is unimpeachable. The rest of the story you know.'

'It means,' said Pry, 'that now we have got a genuine product, and are ready to market it honestly, it stands discredited over the entire Continent of Europe.'

'That is so, and you will have the greatest difficulty in overcoming the harm that has been done. Food research stations and government authorities have been set against the stuff. Farmers in many countries are still claiming compensation for the loss of animals; the agents have sustained severe damage to their reputation and trade. The Board have quibbled about my expenses on the Continent, but the maintenance of personal relations with the foreign agents is imperative; despite what has happened you will have to go abroad and persuade them to give you another chance. It is hard luck, Mr. Pry, but the bride is despoiled.'

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Pry could say nothing; MacDuff was speaking as though it were a foregone conclusion that it would be he, Pry, who would have to travel as the Company's ambassador; his excitement that such a job should be coming to him was lost in an overwhelming sense of impotence and fear; for he had never negotiated an agency in his life, and knew no more French or German than was necessary to struggle through a technical paper or to get the simplest necessities on a foreign holiday.

MacDuff regarded him thoughtfully: 'I shall now dictate a letter in your presence. . . .'

'Ah, Miss Willoughby, please take this: "Dear Lord Lambsbottam," No! call him the Chairman, Hydro-Mechanical Constructions (Great Britain) Ltd., "Dear Sir, In accordance with the Board's decision on the blank instant"—fill in the date, Miss Willoughby—"I have to-day given to Mr. Pry a comprehensive account of the present position, in so far as it concerns the synthetics side of the Company's business, together with information as agreed concerning . . ."'

MacDuff walked too and fro across the office as he dictated this long communication, ready punctuated for typing. Each phrase as he released it sounded as though it ought to kill something stone dead, and Pry was very nearly as much impressed as Miss Willoughby. The letter concluded: "... awaits immediate confirmation full stop In order that there may be no misunderstanding comma I am dictating this letter in the presence of Mr. Pry comma to whom I have handed a copy full stop Yours, eh, faithfully." That clear, Miss Willoughby? While you type it I will show Mr. Pry

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over the works. You would like that, Mr. Pry? Put on your hat.'

MacDuff walked Pry at a rapid pace through the various sheds of which the factory was composed; they bore a resemblance to the moulding sheds of a foundry. The floor was covered deep in sand; there were heaps of rubble and cement; and men were kneeling on the sand, tamping cement into moulds. Not very many men; the whole activity was attenuated. 'This,' said MacDuff, 'is the Garden Ornaments Department.' They stopped for a moment and a workman opened a mould, exposing a concrete cupid holding a sparrow; other men were making concrete imitations of tree trunks for garden seats. Another bay had a travelling crane and an immense pit dug in the floor, 'Large Art', said MacDuff, 'for public parks and exhibitions'. There was nothing whatever doing in the Large Art Department; a mass of concrete having some resemblance to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse had been abandoned, and broken figures of a Discobolus, various Venuses, and Epsteinish things with geometrical muscles stonily suckling their young, lay half buried in the sand. In the General Shop, there was more activity; concrete kerbs, fireplaces and fencing posts were being made: a few of these things were in the semi-transparent material, but for the rest it was just ordinary pre-cast concrete.

'Where,' said Pry, after a while, 'do you make the Kosoff houses?'

'It has not been found profitable to develop that application of the process; you saw the sole and only

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Kosoff house in the yard as you came in. Come, let me show you the cement store.'

Pry was interested to watch a group of men who were busy breaking up faulty work with sledge hammers. 'You get a lot of scrap in this work?' he asked, ingenuously.

'Oh, come and have some tea,' said MacDuff.

The works canteen was a wooden shack which smelled abominably of cheap coffee essence and the lingering staleness of onion stews. A middle-aged woman, stout and rather vulgar, dressed in a nurse's uniform, was interrupted by their entry in the act of haranguing a girl who was doing something by a gas stove. Her voice had risen to a high-pitched scream. She stopped in confusion, wiped her hands on the uniform and came towards MacDuff with a smile which was meant to convey how happy everyone was feeling. Pry watched the development of this smile.

'This is Mrs. Block, our Welfare Worker,' said MacDuff, distastefully.

'Does he want some tea?' asked Mrs. Block.

'If that is no inconvenience to you.'

'The Staff Room is behind the curtain. . . .' Mrs. Block led the way. 'Of course we have to make a distinction between the Staff and work-people.'

MacDuff made his excuses to Pry and said he would see him later. From his seat in the refined part of the shack behind the chintz curtains, Pry had a clear view of the counter.

With a vague sense of physical discomfort, Pry remained gazing at a printed enquiry, which hung

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between advertisements for Woodbines and Lemon Squash above the cash register: 'Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?'

No sooner had MacDuff gone out than Mrs. Block began whispering to the girl, and Pry caught the name of Mr. Cloacher. The girl scuttled off.

Presently Mrs. Block brought him a cup of tea, a breakfast cup, with unextracted bits of tea leaves floating about in it, and a good deal spilt in the saucer. 'A nice cup of tea is very refreshing,' said Mrs. Block, taking a seat uninvited at the table, 'especially if you come on important business.'

'Yes,' said Pry, 'very refreshing.'

'Our Mr. Cloacher is very particular about the Welfare in the works; if people are looked after and made to feel comfortable it makes all the difference to the work, don't you think so, Mr. . . . eh?'

Pry neglected the invitation to mention his name, but expressed agreement.

'Of course I'm a trained nurse, that's very important with the girls, you know. We have a Rest Room, where they can go — in the firm's time. Mr. Cloacher won't deduct their money at those periods, if they just go and tell him. But I forgot, are you a married man, Mr. . . . eh?'

'Well, in a way . . .' said Pry.

'I quite understand; of course we never interfere in the work-people's *private* lives. We had a man here in the moulding shop and I knew he was living with a married woman. I spoke to Mr. Cloacher about it, of course, and we had to watch him to see that he didn't

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interfere with the other girls, but we didn't put him off, and he was making good money too, until we lost the contract.'

'Ah,' said Pry.

'It's very sad, isn't it, about the business. I'm sure Mr. Cloacher works like a Trojan, but it's those expensive Head Offices, and that other factory. I always said that cocaine business was a mistake — of course they have to be so very careful how they sell it. If you believe me I can scarcely pass a policeman in the street without blushing, and then certain people always going off to Paris — I feel so sorry for poor Mr. Cloacher, he's worked himself to the bone.'

'Yes,' said Pry, groping his way through the implications of all this, 'I am sure you must feel it is very sad.'

He was alarmed at the result of this remark, for this very unpleasant female was smirking as though she could eat him, and if he went on being nice she would soon be stroking his thighs. Fortunately a third party at that moment broke in: it was Mr. Cloacher.

He stood for a moment staring about, obviously looking for the visitor of whose presence he had been warned. When he saw Pry — and the hut was quite small — he assumed an expression meant to convey that he had dropped in quite by accident and the encounter was a most pleasurable surprise. Pry, who had a habit of watching people's faces, which dated back to his childhood, saw these changes of expression in slow motion and found them most informative.

'How are you, old boy?' said Mr. Cloacher, as

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though he had been spending his evenings with Pry in a public house for the last fifteen years. 'Is it cold enough for your Lordship?'

Pry withdrew his hand from a moist and flabby contact, and felt apprehensive that Mr. Cloacher's alopecia might be infectious; it certainly looked most unpleasant.

'I haven't had the time yet to come over to East Bullock and see how you are getting on. But d'you ever meet my old friend Balsam out that way, big man with a bit of an impediment in his speech, he's one of the best. He's a J.P. Should have thought you would have met him . . . you must come along to my golf club, some time, and meet the boys. . . .'

'That is very kind of you, but I don't play golf.'

'You must come along and meet Balsam, anyway, he's a great lad, he'll show you how to put down a barrel of the best. Plays a great game and goes home p——d every night.'

Pry screwed his face into what he hoped might be taken as a 'laddish' expression. He was watching the works cat, a lean mongrel evidently in the family way, stealing a piece of meat from a shelf by the gas stove. The animal got her prize and sneaked with it under the tables, making for the door. The feeling that Mr. Cloacher was going to tread on her had entered Pry's mind, and it worried him. This Mr. Cloacher was such a fleshy beast of a man, he must have weighed over eighteen stone. Pry felt a distinct sense of relief when the cat bolted past him into the yard.

'And how's everything with you, going well, eh? We

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shall soon have to make you a Professor and put your name in the papers. . . .'

'If you will excuse me, Mr. Cloacher, I must go back to Mr. MacDuff, I believe he is waiting for me.'

'Ah, there you are, Mr. Pry, I was just going to send for you, sit down; what do you think of the works?'

'I certainly think you have some very cheap labour.'

'You have met our Mr. Cloacher, eh?'

'And the woman, Mrs. Block; there seems to be some conspiracy between them, I'm afraid I don't understand.'

'I am leaving this place to-night, Mr. Pry, and I left you out there deliberately; you are capable of forming your own conclusions.'

'I see,' said Pry, 'it's very good of you.'

'Not at all. I am, amongst other things, Mr. Pry, a sea-faring man, and there is a certain code of honour, which I hope you will uphold. There is one other small matter; I have a sextant here, it's old but still quite serviceable, I should like you to accept it from me.'

Pry took it: a beautiful old instrument, stained with the salt of the seven seas.

'Useful for navigation,' said MacDuff, laughing. 'Most appropriate. Good-bye and the best of luck, Mr. Pry.'

C H A P T E R   X I I

I N F O R M A T I O N   R E C E I V E D

IT was some days before Brigadier-General Sunderland Thump brought the files. He wrote a letter to Pry officially stating that he was going to bring them; and Pry wrote another letter officially stating that he had received the communication and had noted its contents; but the 'matter' hung fire. Pry had never encountered a Brigadier-General in the flesh and he awaited the interview with considerable nervousness.

'General Thump to see you,' announced Miss Rosewood at last.

Pry went into the General Office. A uniformed chauffeur was carrying in the files, and an insignificant little man was fussing about, seeing that they were not put down anywhere where there was any dust. 'Ink should not be left about uncovered,' said this gentleman, irritably pushing at a glass inkwell that seemed to him in the way. The inkwell had stuck to the desk and it gave suddenly, splashing the ink over his fingers. 'It's disgraceful!' said the General. Pry stood and regarded him with amusement. He was all dressed up in formal morning dress, with spats, and he looked very, very pathetic. One half of his face was all drawn in with pox marks and the rest was very red. It seemed an act of human kindness to let this poor old man have his military title, so Pry did so: 'General Thump, I believe.' He smiled and advanced his hand.

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The General ignored the gesture, 'I shall have to ask you to sign a receipt for these,' he said, producing a list and elaborately unwinding a fountain pen.

Pry began checking off the files on the list.

'tck, 'tck,' said the General, 'I have no time to waste.'

'Shall I sign for them "unexamined?"' asked Pry sweetly.

'What right have you to suggest that any of the files have been abstracted?'

Pry went on with the checking: 'There are five missing,' he said at last. 'Nos. 43, 47, 105, 214 and 215.'

The General danced about for some time between the files and the list, then he looked up indignantly: 'Those files are with the Company's solicitors.'

'Then I shan't sign for them,' said Pry. He drew lines through the missing items and signed for the rest.

'The General doesn't seem to like me,' said Pry to Miss Rosewood, when the gallant gentleman had gone off in a huff.

'He's very unreasonable.'

'He's a blundering old idiot, but fortunately we're *not* in the Army.'

Pry took half a dozen of the files home with him to Snoot House each evening and sat up until one in the morning reading them and making notes. He found it trying to do this perusal at the works, because Ackworth, who shared what Pry had long since come to regard as *his* office, was rather given to 'snooping'.

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That is to say he would stand behind Pry and read the papers over his shoulder or he would sit in his chair opposite and keep asking questions. The work on the purification of the syrup suffered in consequence.

'Well,' said Zaareb, when he next came to the works, 'and how are you getting on with the historical research?'

'I've been wading through Klamac's precious reports and the interminable stuff about foreign agencies. Tucked away amongst it all, I've just found a little agreement with a Messrs. Graball, Sons & Co., of Dimchester; they've been given the exclusive selling rights over the whole of the British Empire for the next ten years; but that doesn't seem to have been regarded as of any consequence, it's just an afterthought.'

'It is really remarkable,' said Dr. Zaareb, 'how these people who think they are business men go whoring after foreign gods.'

'The foreign gods don't seem to have been very kind to them. Listen to some of the unsolicited testimonials.' Pry opened the files before him at places marked with slips of paper and read:

'Messrs. Boulevard and Carrosse, Agents for France, Belgium, Spain and the French, Belgian and Spanish Colonies, Protectorates, and Mandated Territories, write: "In trials on 47 hard-worked horses of a Rouenoise transport company, a ration per 1000 kilos live weight of the beasts, of 4.1 kilos Cocaine synthetic syrup, 5.6 kilos wheat bran and 5.9 kilos corn was given for two months. At the end of

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two months 7 horses were dead and the trial was discontinued.” ’

‘Signor Flavius Bombolo, Agent for Italy and the Italian Empire, writes: “Not only were the consequences of the administration of the Cocaine synthetic syrup to beasts in all cases deplorable, but in an Institution for the care of children of political prisoners three deaths have occurred as a result of the experiments and amongst the survivors there have appeared disorders of a serious character.” ’

‘Representanta Güssler, General Agent for the Balkans, writes: “Unfortunately no experimentation could be made with the samples, and the business is suspended, as the goods have been seized by the Customs authorities.” ’

‘Stop! said Zaareb. ‘There’s no use in going over all this again, the harm has been done and we know now what the Cocaine stuff was. The question now is what you are going to do with the new syrup which *has* got sixty per cent of sugars in it. You will have to make the recommendations to the Board.’

‘I don’t know yet what my position is going to be.’

‘We won’t waste time talking about that. After the Cocaine fiasco you have got to restore some sort of confidence in *any* stuff that is put out by this Company. The first step is to have the new syrup thoroughly tested by a competent authority.’

‘On white rats?’

‘On the proper material for animal experimentation.

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You must get the Board's approval for an investigation to be carried out by Dr. Sinus, of the Food Research Station. Sinus has promised me that he will do it, on terms, the rest I am leaving to you.'

'Do we wait until we have found means of purifying the syrup?'

'No. I have my own reasons for wanting the tests done first on the crude stuff. And you can't go to the Board with a policy of further delays. Show them we have got our teeth in something, at once.'

'Another thing,' Zaareb went on. 'See that the name "Cocaine" is dropped. "COCAINE Synthetic Sugar" has been dragged through the mire, and it's cumbersome and stupid anyway. Call our stuff "SUNSAP" and stick to it. Only Mr. MacDuff could have christened it that, but it will do. Take out a registered trade mark.'

'And what do you think ought to be done about all these Continental agents, what do we suggest they should be told?'

'It doesn't matter a damn what we tell them. With the present state of affairs in Europe the Board ought to know that the possibility of any real trade with the Continent is remote. But you can't take that line. Write to them all with Roman courtesy, and tell them we've got some new stuff, tell them what's in it as far as we know and say they can have samples if they like.'

'Isn't that giving away information to foreign competitors?'

'You can't try to sell the stuff and at the same time hide it under a bushel.' Zaareb flared up. 'And the

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Board have got to be told that all this talk about foreign agents is precipitate, we don't know yet what the stuff is going to be used for, or what it's going to cost.'

'So far as I can see at present it couldn't be sold for less than nine or ten pounds a ton.'

'About one and a half times as much as molasses. Well, that rules out sending it to the alcohol distilleries — for making motor spirit — they are the chief consumers of molasses, and molasses are a drug on the market already. We can't hope to sell the crude stuff for human consumption, so what we are really narrowed down to is a new foodstuff for animals. Unless we can extract pure d. glucose or something like that later on, what we have got is a foodstuff for animals. And we must hope there is something in the stuff that makes it one and a half times as valuable to the farmer as feeding treacle. I see no great promise of that, but it's not impossible.'

Pry realized in all this that Zaareb was pushing him up on his own feet, putting into his mouth the first things he would have to tell the Board, and making him face up both to responsibility and to the realities of the situation. He had been half dreaming about the winning of food from the air and about the past follies of the Company. He had not allowed himself to think much about the *cost* of the stuff before.

Zaareb smiled. 'These are not matters for me, you know, nobody credits a scientist with any business ability. But there are times when it is necessary to clear one's mind of cant, and there's no *a priori* reason for believing that synthetic syrup is going to be any *more*

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valuable than natural syrup. But there is just one thing that may cheer you a little; you leave part of my blue catalyst in, don't you ... that contains calcium, phosphorus, chlorine, magnesium and a little iron.'

'Oh!' said Pry, pursing his lips. 'Mineral constituents of feeding stuffs — that is why you say try the crude syrup?'

'Precisely. Now before the Board permit you to write any letters, take down this description of the syrup and don't try to improve on it.'

Pry took down the specification. 'Can't we even say the stuff's been "irradiated"?' he asked, wistfully. 'People think there is some magic in commodities that have been "irradiated" and the Lord knows our stuff has been irradiated long enough.'

'It means nothing, but I'll concede you that. Now, how does it read?'

'SUNSAP, Irradiated Synthetic Syrup, contains sixty per cent by weight of Total Sugars: Glucose, Fructose, Mannose, Galactose, etcetera; together with small amounts of Calcium, Phosphorus, Iron, and other Mineral Constituents; and also traces of organic compounds other than sugars, whose character is as yet undetermined.'

'That,' said Dr. Zaareb, 'is as far as I am prepared to go. Anybody who wants further particulars, and is competent to understand them, you can refer to me.'

'It's damn good,' said Pry. 'Creates the desire for possession, contains a tactful warning, is strictly accur-

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ate, and altogether qualifies for the Little George Washington Peace Prize in Advertising.'

Zaareb didn't mind.

'I really don't know,' said Mary, one evening, characteristically ignoring everything that Pry had ever said on the subject, 'why you want a home. You come back here every evening, eat your meal with a book stuck up in front of you, and then sit till it's time to go to bed, chuckling away over your papers and getting so excited you can't sleep at night, and keep me awake tossing and turning, till it's time to get up, and you don't throw me as many words as I throw bones to a cat. What *is* happening?'

'That's just the point. Nothing is happening. Since the Brigadier-General came and dumped the files on me, I've heard nothing more. I've no authority to do MacDuff's work, or any part of it. The samples haven't been sent off. The laboratory work continues, but everything else is at a standstill. I'm working *in vacuo*, plotting what I would do if I had the chance. This, for example, is a plan of the new plant.'

'And you are thoroughly enjoying yourself . . .'

'Working day and night, maybe to no purpose?'

'Bah! when have you ever done anything that you haven't managed to *use*; and when have you ever worked a minute longer than you were compelled on anything you hadn't a real itch to do? Don't be such a hypocrite.'

'But, Mary, it's all on spec. Why should they pick on me?'

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'Don't "Mary" me! In any group of people, have you ever known a man who knows his own mind clearly and goes straight for what he wants — not getting away with it? People are such shilly-shufflers, they like nothing better than to have their minds made up for them. Do you really expect that Board to be any exception?'

'No.'

'Then what are you grumbling about?'

The suspense was ended soon enough by the arrival at the works of the pink-pated Mr. Leary, with a large document case, and a pronouncement on behalf of the Board. What Mr. Leary had to say gave Pry more satisfaction than he had ever dared to hope for. He referred to his previous visit to the works, with his co-director Mr. Ketch, and to the resignation of Mr. MacDuff, and then came at once to the point:

'I am going to ask you, Mr. Pry, to assume a full sense of responsibility; and to set forth a complete scheme for the commercial development of this process of yours and Dr. Zaareb's for the guidance of the Board. You will be asked to take up the work where it was left by Mr. MacDuff. I have felt a difficulty about this, in that at the present stage you cannot be spared on the technical side of the work here, but it is hoped that with suitable assistance you may be able to deal with both. You will have the assistance of the Company's solicitors. Unfortunately I myself am not a technical man, but I shall give you what help I can in matters of finance and organization, and I promise that you shall have the full backing of the Board.'

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So he had got MacDuff's job and he had not lost his own. Pry experienced a moment of great happiness, as though heaven had suddenly let fall its radiance upon him; he went very pale, but showed no other sign of emotion.

'The first thing we have to do,' said Pry, 'is to test our product as a foodstuff for animals; the second is to erect the new plant; the third is to smash the agreements with Messrs. Graball of Dimchester; and the fourth is to sell "SUNSAP" on the *Home* market.'

'Ah!' said Mr. Leary. 'But Graball's is only one of the scandalous agreements that have to be dealt with. I am amazed by some of the things that have been done by this Company. I have only recently been co-opted on the Board, and I have been unable to read everything. My eyes trouble me a little, they are under treatment by a specialist.' He pressed his hands over his eyes. Pry looked concerned.

'It is not very serious, but I am not a young man, and I am thankful it is the only indisposition I am called upon to suffer. Now, the matter I want to discuss with you to-day is the cost of the new plant, and what reservation must be made to carry this business over its experimental period. I do not expect you have been told about the financial position of this Company, and I am going to be quite frank with you. There is a movement to put this Company at once into voluntary liquidation, and I and Mr. Ketch have been put on the Board by a committee of the preference shareholders, to investigate the Company's affairs.'

'I had no idea . . .' said Pry, feeling that fortune had

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dangled before him a great opportunity, only at once to snatch it away again. 'Can things really be so bad . . . with three million pounds capital?'

'Practically the whole of the Issued Capital has been squandered, Mr. Pry, and the Company's liquid assets are now negligible; the business can only be carried on by calling up the unpaid capital; and we, who represent the preference shareholders, who will have to find the money, will not agree to that, unless we are convinced that your "SUNSAP" is going to be a commercial success.'

'What about the Kosoff Constructions and the Bingham Factory?'

'That undertaking has never shown a profit. You do not know that within six months of its incorporation this Company had lost nearly a half of its working capital over a scheme to build a new city — Quartzburg — and that never a spadeful of earth was turned up nor a single skip of concrete poured. Kosoff's Constructions have come down from cities to unit dwelling houses, from dwelling houses to telephone booths, from telephone booths to fencing posts and garden ornaments, and all along there has been nothing but loss. The Kosoff processes for which this Company paid one million pounds have been shown to be worthless, the Company has only a little ordinary pre-cast concrete business now, and even that does not pay. When it was known that Kosoff Constructions were a failure, the Board, in a panic, listened once again to Mr. Kosoff and acquired the Cocaine Processes in a desperate attempt to repair the Company's fortunes.'

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Those processes again are worthless, their attempted exploitation led to another heavy loss. There are crippling liabilities; service agreements with consultants and advisers who have never given this Company a word of honest counsel or advice; the factories are heavily mortgaged; the quartz mine at Llangrimnog has been abandoned; there are luxurious office premises dotted about the Continent all empty and still held on long-term leases, and you have seen the scale of things at Agastral House . . .'

'There must be something behind all this.'

'There is nothing behind it, Mr. Pry, except sheer stupidity and folly. It is a story, Mr. Pry, with which I, as an accountant, am all too familiar. There has been no germ of caution in basing expenditure on mere expectations of future profits. And do not run away with the idea that the Board of this Company is to blame, it is composed of honourable men of high standing who have made not one penny out of it themselves; they have been the victims of too sanguine hopes, they have been robbed right and left by men who have played on their credulity; they are surrounded by enormous liabilities and commitments for which they have received no valuable consideration . . .'

'But . . .' cried Pry, suddenly hitting the table and for a moment breaking through his restraints, 'out of it all has come SUGAR FROM THE AIR!'

Instantly recovering his self-possession, Pry tried to restrain the moisture that crept into his eyes.

Leary regarded him a trifle coldly. 'You are an enthusiast, Mr. Pry, but I believe you to be an honest

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man.' In a moment he continued. 'As you perceive, the future of this Company depends on your synthetic products, and if you do not honestly and sincerely believe they can be made a success, not a technical but a commercial success, you must have the courage to say so now.'

'I will make them a success, if you give me the authority, the money, and the time — ' Then, dropping miserably from major issues to details, and speaking of both confusedly in the same breath, Pry added: 'I must have a biologist.'

'The first part of what you say is of more interest to me than the second,' said Mr. Leary. 'Assuming that we decide to call on the shareholders for more money and continue with this enterprise, when do you estimate that "SUNSAP" will be tested and ready for marketing?'

'Not before next year.'

'And what would be the manufacturing costs, have you gone into that?'

'Yes,' said Pry, taking a complete costing estimate from his desk and handing it over. 'With a new plant to produce forty tons a week, the first cost would be about four pounds ten per ton; allowing an inclusive figure of one hundred per cent for overhead charges and profit, it could be sold naked ex works for about nine pounds per ton. About one and a half times as much as molasses.'

'What is the significance of the comparison with molasses?'

Pry explained the significance.

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'Then why do you say there can be commercial success?'

'Because the synthetic syrup contains valuable mineral constituents not present in molasses; because we may hope later on to extract from the crude syrup a pure product for human food; and because there are by-products which may be valuable.'

'These developments will necessitate continuing research?'

'Yes.'

'And the new plant, of course you have not had time to do anything about that . . .'

Pry picked up a roll of drawings and handed it to Mr. Leary. 'Those are the plans,' he said, 'for a plant to produce forty tons a week. And this is an estimate of what it will cost.'

'That is two thousand tons a year; at ten pounds a ton that is only twenty thousand pounds turnover, and the net profit could not be more than two or three thousand pounds; you appreciate that is a very small business?'

'It is a practical beginning,' said Pry, 'and we have a long way to go before we have built up even that.'

'It is a very thin thing for me to put before the Shareholders' Committee, but it seems sound, and perhaps I may be able to take a more optimistic view of the situation — how did you manage to get all this work done?'

Pry shrugged his shoulders, took the roll of plans Mr. Leary handed back to him, and replaced them on his desk.

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'During this conversation,' said Mr. Leary, 'I have found myself impelled to give consideration to a course of action on which it was not my intention at present to embark. I am going to ask you to attend a full meeting of the Board.'

CHAPTER X I I I

## A BOARD MEETING

HERE's the invitation,' said Pry, passing the letter to Mary, a few days later. 'It reads like a command to attend before the King in Council, and it's signed in person by Brigadier-General Sunderland Thump. And it's on the Company's official notepaper this time, with the names of all the Directors — gives me fair warning of what I'm in for. Have I got a clean shirt?'

'There's the blue check one, that's one of your best — but don't you think you'd better sport a stiff collar?'

'It's not as serious as all that; and there's no reason for me to start crawling before them in any stiff collars . . . give me that letter: Lord Lambsbottam (Chairman). The Marquis of Dillwater, A.S.D.T.R. (Vice-Chairman). Joshua Leary, F.I.A.P.; Herbert P. Ketch, O.B.E., M.P.; Sir Willin Clutch, Bart., M.P.; Usidlenie Kosoff (Uranian); Major T. Haw-Stag, D.S.O., and Mr. John Mayfair Smith, F.Z.S. Secretary: Brig.-Gen. Sunderland Thump. One Lord, one Brigadier-General, one Major, one Marquis, one Baronet, one Accountant, two M.P.s, and a Uranian. It ought to be picturesque.'

'For all you know they may be quite decent people; you'll only prejudice your own chances by bristling up like this . . .'

'No decent person parades a military title in civil life.'

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'Except on the stage,' said Mary. 'You don't have to live with this crowd; can't you play up to them . . . it's childish to give yourself away . . . be a disembodied intellect or something like that.'

'Not if it means wearing a stiff collar, I won't.'

' . . . The Marquis of Dillwater . . . isn't he the dirt-track racing nuisance? I seem to have seen his name in the papers.'

'Yes, his life's work is making the nation Dillwater-and-Dirt-Track-Conscious: he'll end by breaking his neck, which will be a great pity. Mr. Mayfair Smith probably goes in for armaments, sort of under-cover commission agent for trench mortars. Nice lot, but honourable English gentlemen — except Kosoff, of course, who's a Uranian, whatever that may be.'

'You'll probably find them all quite different from your preconceptions.'

"Please to come to the 'lodge',

These premature flings at the dignities of the Board did not by any means represent the whole of Pry's feelings. It was all very well to tell Mary: 'I ain't afraid of lions, them's got no table manners,' but facing the lions was another matter entirely.

By walking round Agastral House a few times, to exhaust the five minutes by which he had arrived early, Pry contrived to present himself at the Secretary's office that afternoon exactly on the stroke of three, the appointed hour, with a very fair simulation of being casual and unperturbed. General Thump looked up from his desk and asked him how he was,

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'Exactly the same as when you came to the works,' replied Pry, affably. 'Where's the Board, do I go right in?'

The general leapt up and seized the knob of the door. 'No, No, No!' he said, aghast, 'the Board are in conference.'

'Oh, then I'll wait,' said Pry, and ignoring the chair offered to him, he took a seat on the radiator by the window, first helping himself to a suspiciously unworn copy of *Stevens' Mercantile Law* from the bookcase. He read this work stolidly for half an hour and took in nothing whatever. The 'Board' rang for the General, and Pry watched him with interest as he removed some imaginary dust from his coat with a brush before gathering up his papers and scuttling in.

'Stay there,' he said, ridiculously, before leaving Pry alone.

When he reappeared he whispered fearfully: 'You are to go in now.'

Pry entered the Board Room, took in the spectacle presented by nine formally dressed elderly gentlemen, of varying degrees of obesity and baldness, disposed around the mahogany Board table in a haze of cigar smoke, and stood at ease waiting to be addressed.

'Ah, come in, come in, Mr. Pry,' said the gentleman at the head of the table, evidently the Chairman, mellowly. Lord Lambsbottam had, curiously enough, two little tufts of what looked exactly like lambswool growing above his ears. These, added to the peculiar shape of his head, which resembled that of a fiddle, and was nearly as highly polished, gave him not only a

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benign but a positively philanthropic appearance. A chair was found for Mr. Pry beside Mr. Leary, his sponsor. Immediately opposite sat an enormously wide gentleman, with a proportionately large and heavy face, puffing steadily at a very big cigar, which he wore cocked at the hangings of the twenty-point electric candelabrum. He had a pair of surprisingly blue eyes, which looked as mild and innocent as a baby's. Sir Willin Clutch (Bart.), Pry learned later. Chancing to catch Pry's regard, and misinterpreting its disinterested curiosity, the baronet nodded, as in recognition, and automatically passed Pry the box of cigars.

I am getting on, thought Pry, as one impressive gentleman produced a silver gadget to puncture the cigar for him, and another applied a light to it. A carbon copy of his own report, together with a copy of the report Leary had made on his visit, both marked 'Mr. Pry', were handed along the table to him.

'I want first of all to tell you, Mr. Pry, that the Board have resolved that you should be thanked for your valuable, and, if I may say so, your very interestingly worded report.' Lord Lambsbottam looked at Pry over his spectacles, with a touch of amusement in his eyes.

'I thought it unnecessary to waste time on any circumlocution.'

'Quite, quite,' said Lambsbottam. 'I am sure my co-Directors have appreciated that. Now with regard to this biologist, ahem, Miss Theta . . .' The Chairman looked up at the other Directors. 'Mr. Pry has

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been good enough to draft a letter to Dr. Sinus, of the Food Research Station, which is before you.' With the exception of Mr. Leary, who read his copy closely, the Directors glanced at their papers with complete lack of interest. 'Miss Theta is a lady, I understand . . .'

'Well, yes!' said Pry, 'but the point is that she is recommended by Dr. Sinus, who is a recognized authority on his subject, as a most suitable person to undertake the necessary biological work on animals, under his direction at the Research Station.'

'The modern tendency is to ignore the sex-differential in industry,' remarked the Marquis of Dillwater.

'Never have a woman about the place: damn nuisance,' added Major T. Haw-Stag.

'Perhaps you have some alternative suggestion,' ventured Pry.

'Ahem, well, on the whole, I think I see no objection to this letter being sent to Dr. Sinus. Is it your wish, gentlemen, that the letter should be sent?' The Chairman looked over his glasses. A murmur seemed to indicate that it was the gentlemen's wish, and the Secretary recorded the decision for the Minute Book.

Very slowly the Board worked over the other draft letters that Pry had prepared for them. The honourable gentlemen altered a sentence here and there, mainly with the effect of greatly increasing its length and depriving it of any precise meaning, but in the end all the letters went through, and they came at last to the proposals for the new plant.

It was at that point that Mr. Kosoff (Uranian) set the Board-table matches on fire. They were an outsize

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in matches, standing in a sort of porcelain water-lily bud, with their heads up. You ignited them by striking them vigorously on the roughened side of the bud; Kosoff did it the wrong way, and the lot went up with a violent sulphurous blaze. It was the Brigadier-General who carried them out, and who opened the window and did the interesting *pas seul*, with a blotting pad, chasing the fumes about.

'As I was saying . . .' continued Lord Lambsbottam, when the honourable gentlemen had finished choking and waving handkerchiefs, 'the question of the new plant is one that, I feel, should be referred to the Preference Shareholders' Committee.'

'I misconstrue,' cried Mr. Kosoff. 'In some delay there is no use, it must immediately be done, in the synthetics are big profits, you do not know how big profits. By the Kosoff Process must the new plant at once be made. Mr. Pry shall go to our Bingham manager, Mr. Cloacher, and he will give you all-you-want . . .'

'I must remind you that there are financial considerations,' said Mr. Leary indignantly.

'By Kosoff construction it will cost nothing; something perhaps; a bagatelle — we must have immediately a report.'

After a violent argument across the table between the explosive Mr. Kosoff and the righteous Mr. Leary, the Chairman again looked over his spectacles: 'Is it your wish, gentlemen, that Mr. Pry should discuss the construction of the new plant with Mr. Cloacher, that Mr. Cloacher should be asked to submit a report, and

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that meanwhile the matter should be referred to the Preference Shareholders' Committee?"

The resolution was passed, although Mr. Kosoff continued to 'disconstrue'.

Damn, thought Pry. That his new plant should be involved with Kosoff Constructions was the last thing he had anticipated. It was so patently obvious that the Kosoff Constructional methods didn't work. And now, he had got to refer to this clod of a Mr. Cloacher, and have his plans incompetently mauled and muddled over. The thought of it was like gall to him, and it put him in the wrong — or perhaps it was the right — mood for what was to follow.

'There remains the question of Mr. Pry's appointment, and the definition of his new duties . . .'

Pry sat up and stubbed out his cigar.

'It is not the intention of the Board to have any more Managing Directors.' Lambsbottam regarded Pry quizzically.

'So I understand,' said Pry.

'But we are going to appoint you manager of the Company's Synthetics Business. You will report directly to the Board, and we shall entrust you with a fairly wide discretion in matters of detail. In some respects your position will be preferable to that of a Managing Director, and — if I may say so without offence — I feel that you have earned this opportunity.'

'Am I to deal with selling agents and put "SUNSAP" on the map?'

'You will certainly have to do that, but you will refer all matters involving questions of policy to the

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Board, as you have already done, with those that we have considered to-day. You will not be empowered to commit the Company's credit for more than, shall we say, one hundred pounds, without authorization. You understand there must be that provision?"

'Yes,' said Pry, 'that's fair enough. I will go ahead and do my best.'

'I have every confidence that you will, and in this I feel that I express the opinion of my co-Directors as well as my own personal view.' A murmur, which might be taken to mean assent, came from the Board. It was not a loud murmur, for Sir Willin Clutch had apparently gone to sleep; the Marquis was absorbed in drawing dog kennels on his blotting-pad, and Kosoff was talking excitedly about motor accidents with the Company's solicitor. 'If there are no other matters, gentlemen, the meeting will now adjourn until next . . .'

'There *is* one other matter,' said Pry, speaking up loudly above the din. 'Is it your intention to increase my salary?'

Even Sir Willin Clutch woke up at this outrageous interruption; Mr. Leary looked righteously and deeply offended that such a thing should come from his soft-spoken protégé, and even the benign Lambsbottam was pained.

'Is that so unreasonable a question?' demanded Mr. Pry.

'You must understand,' said Mr. Leary, 'that in order to continue at all with your synthetics, this Company is called upon to make serious sacrifices, and this is not the time to put forward such a demand.'

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'You ask me to undertake all this new work, in addition to what I am doing already, and you only want to go on paying me my miserable three hundred and seventy-five pounds a year?'

'Are you not prepared to trust us, when the position of the Company improves, to treat you with every fairness?'

'No,' said Pry, 'that is a formula. And it is a commonplace that the technical man is always passed over as soon as he has served his purpose.'

'You are very young to be so cynical.'

'I am stating what I have learnt by experience,' said Pry.

'I am disposed to feel,' said Lambsbottam, blandly, 'that there is some justice in what Mr. Pry says; three hundred and seventy-five pounds a year is not an excessive salary . . . perhaps we could discuss this more freely in the absence of Mr. Pry.'

Pry walked towards the door. 'Wait out there a few minutes,' said Lambsbottam, kindly. 'Don't go away.' General Thump was also excluded and Pry walked up and down his office, forcing the little man to listen to the most terrible heresies that had ever been uttered in his presence by an employee about his Board.

' . . . lousy sanctimonious humbugs', he went on. 'They pay Cocaine a thousand a year for doing nothing, they paid MacDuff five thousand, now they want to load what Cocaine was supposed to do, on top of what MacDuff was supposed to do, and dump it all on me for a despicable three hundred and seventy-five . . . ! Calling on me to make sacrifices? What have they ever

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sacrificed, except the bloody shareholders . . . WHAT, I ask you?' He stooped accusingly before the horrified General Thump, ignored his invitation to 'sssh!' and continued:

'Know what they reckoned to have to pay for an engineer, when they put in the advertisement I was fool enough to answer? Six hundred! Six hundred a year! I've got it in black-and-white, there was a memo about it in MacDuff's files which you brought me. And because I was unemployed and couldn't afford to bark, they got me for three hundred and seventy-five. I suppose they felt ever so good about that dirty little economy. Now they want to butter me with a lot of bloody flattery, and go on paying me three hundred and seventy-five. They can go to hell.'

Pry was interrupted by the buzzer. 'They want you to go in,' whispered Thump, raising a warning finger.

Pry, who rather enjoyed baiting the general, had by no means lost his temper. He reappeared before the Directors perfectly calm and collected. They regarded him curiously.

'The Board have decided,' said Lambsbottam simply, 'to increase your salary to five hundred pounds a year. I hope that you will feel content with that for the present.'

'Yes,' said Pry, 'that's appreciably better. Thank you.'

The front door was open when Pry returned to Snoot House that evening, and Mary ran out of the

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kitchen to embrace him. 'Ham!' she said, shaking him, 'how did you get on?'

'Five hundred,' said Ham, succinctly.

By way of celebration they went to the local cinema. It was a foolish thing to do; for in the first place the Plaza was filled with the scented mustiness of a barber's shop, and in the second the programme was a bad one, provoking feelings of bitterness and fear, rather than any relief or pleasure. There was a long film about the navy, ostensibly entertaining because of some crude horseplay by two comic sailors behind the guns, but the warships had been lent by the Admiralty, and the thing was intended to provoke sentiments of patriotism and pride of arms, by a cunning exploitation of the beauty of navigation and the sea. There was a film about 'Love', its cardboard settings designed to create illusions of luxury and wealth, utterly unreal, and in fact showing only the ruthless and stupid operation of a censorship, which decreed that procreation is indecent and only marriage and adultery real. Not one glimpse of the shifts by which the English people manage to get a living, when they do, or their courage and patient suffering when they don't. Instead, the British Military News, and a propaganda film issued by the Nominal Government, beginning with a close-up of a senile and ridiculous politician, who had clung to office to the last by apostatizing from every principle on which he had been returned to power, reading drearily about the conscription of industry for national defence, with

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shots of the smirking magnates of great industrial corporations, heroic against shots of chemical factories making nitro-glycerin and mustard gas, and processions of mechanized regiments, fleets of ships and aeroplanes, proud in the possession of vast reserves of projectiles, lethal gases, and bombs. . . .

‘Certainly we can be on the telephone now,’ said Pry, talking over their new fortunes in bed that night. ‘We must be here for a month or two, perhaps as long as a year. But it’s only building up for ourselves future disappointment and misery, to hope for too much from “Sugar from the Air”. The Company is on its last legs; the Directors are —, as I have told you; the technical difficulties are immense; the commercial difficulties I have now only just begun to perceive; and behind it all is being manipulated the terrible *Deus ex machina* of War. The years of peace are running out . . .’

‘We must live for the day, Ham.’

‘At least, I’ve got an honourable job. I am making food, not poison gas. It is a job of which a man need not be ashamed.’

‘They will use your syrup in time of war, Ham, and give you a peerage, if you’re cad enough: “Lord Sunsap of Bullock”. Don’t you remember the sugar shortage in the last war?’

‘I couldn’t get farther away from what they call “Defence” and still be a chemical engineer.’

‘Quiet, Ham, the responsibility is not yours, let us talk of what else we can do with five hundred a year.’ She pressed close to him and stroked her hands down-

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wards from his forehead, as though to pass away all thoughts of future troubles and leave a happier present bare.

‘Ham,’ she said at last, ‘I did not tell you before . . . I am pregnant.’

Pry looked at her anxiously for a moment, and then said laughingly as he embraced her. ‘What else did you expect?’

#### CHAPTER XIV

### CONCERNING WHITE RATS

THE Field Experiment Station of the Eastern College of Animal Nutrition and Food Research was at Pipperhay-under-Crouch, a pleasant Essex village three miles from the nearest railway station. In Pipperhay, the Experiment Station was the only contemporary intrusion, and even so, it had its own garage and car park and its own hostel for the research workers. It lived in an atmosphere of its own.

Miss Theta, investigating the nutritive and the suspected toxic properties of 'SUNSAP' was not working in the main building, which contained the elaborate laboratories, but in an old house used as an extension. The scarifying will of Science had borne down on this house most instructively. The ivy had been stripped from it, the wall-paper removed, the fireplaces and every other domestic fitting taken away, leaving it a shell, divided into compartments by white distempered walls, and clean boarded floors. In these compartments, accurately warmed, ventilated, and isolated from each other, the experimental animals were kept. In Room F, Miss Theta was delicately feeding pieces of raw horseflesh into an electric mincing machine, the horseflesh being the protein constituent of the feed ration for the albino rats. Miss Theta wore her black hair brushed straight, emphasizing a severe and formal cast of features. She had sandals and no stockings,

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and her only visible garment was a white laboratory coat, severely made to the measure of her broad, tall and somewhat rectangular figure. As the laboratory contained nothing so superfluous as a coat hook, Pry folded his mackintosh and placed it neatly on the floor, surmounted by his hat.

'Thought I had best call in,' he said, 'just to see how things are going on.'

'I am afraid there is nothing it would be of interest to you to see; the experiments have been planned by Dr. Sinus, and when they are finished your Company will receive our report. You may look at the animals if you wish.'

Considering that he had prepared the instructions to Dr. Sinus about these investigations, and that he was the representative of the Company who were paying for them to be done, this reception seemed to Mr. Pry a little cool. He did not appreciate the ways of the Medical Profession, of which the experimental station was an offshoot.

'These,' said Miss Theta, after slowly washing her hands in disinfectant solution at the sink, 'are the rats. Control A, normal diet with McCollum's salts. Control B, normal diet without salts. Groups C and E, normal proteins and fats only plus 'SUNSAP', in duplicate. Group F, normal protein only plus 'SUNSAP'. Group G, 'SUNSAP' only. Groups H, I, J, K, L, M, accessory growth factors: five breeding pairs per unit, duplicated.'

All the cages of rats looked exactly the same: a double row of rectangular cages, each with just

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sufficient space for the unfortunate animals to turn round in, and no more. For the sake of variety of exercise the creatures were slowly clambering round the cages, going up the sides, upside down across the top and down the other side. They were all curiously white, with no pigment whatever in their fur, and with delicately pink paws, snouts and eyes. Their albinism was rather horrible.

'Most of the does have been mated,' said Miss Theta, indicating a wall of smaller cages, each with a single occupant.

'When will they be having their, eh . . . their pups?' inquired Pry.

Miss Theta looked at him coldly: 'The normal period of gestation is three weeks, subject to influence by diet, and to the non-occurrence of resorptive pregnancies.'

'Ah,' said Pry. He had never before heard of 'resorptive pregnancies' and mentally docketing the phrase for further inquiry, he contented himself with the reflection that it seemed rather a good idea on the part of nature. It wouldn't do to ask too many questions.

'How long have this lot been having "SUNSAP"?' he asked, returning to the point.

'Ten days.'

'And none of them have died; isn't that promising?'

'Statistical examination of the mortality rates will be necessary before we can make any statement about that; it must be correlated with increase in body weight and fertility factors.'

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Pry, whose idea of testing 'SUNSAP' was just to feed it to the beasts and see if it killed them, was a little taken aback by the complexity of the investigations that he had set in train.

'And of course we must have information on the accessory growth factors A, B, B<sub>1</sub>, C, D, E, F, and G. We are not proposing to go further than G for the first five generations.'

'Do you mean vitamins?' inquired Pry.

'Naturally.'

'Does it really matter about vitamins?' Certainly nothing had been said about vitamins in the contract with Dr. Sinus, and the Company would have to pay for all this.

'I cannot enter into a discussion about the scheme of work laid down by Dr. Sinus.' Miss Theta tapped the floor petulantly with a sandal — that anyone should dare to belittle the importance of vitamins was preposterous. She returned to the bench and began shaking up the minced horseflesh in ether.

'I'm sorry,' said Pry, 'you see it isn't my subject, and I was under the impression that vitamins are just a profitable ramp, put over by the patent food people to give medical hypochondriacs a new interest in life . . .'

'Very amusing, I'm sure,' said Miss Theta.

'What's the ether for?' went on Mr. Pry, positively incapable of improving the situation.

'Removing the fat-solubles A, D, and E,' said Miss Theta, contemptuously.

Pry stood regarding her and making conversa-

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tion about the solvent properties of various organic compounds. He became gradually aware that Miss Theta's extreme dryness was really only a protective measure. He suspected that she was getting immense enjoyment out of the investigation, and that she was as pleased as anybody else to have somebody taking an intelligent interest in what she was doing. In a rare flash of intuition it occurred to Pry that he was dealing with a sort of suffragette, with the over-assertion of the right by a woman, on behalf of women, to equality with men in scientific work. A right that he had never dreamed of disputing.

'I wonder,' he said, 'whether you could leave your animals to an assistant, one of these afternoons, and pay us a visit at the factory. You would then see the people with whom you are collaborating, and the manufacture of "SUNSAP" might be of as much interest to you, as the technique of your biological work is to me.'

One couldn't, he thought, say anything fairer than that. Miss Theta said that she would be charmed, and Pry congratulated himself on the success of a manœuvre, the object of which was to facilitate getting an interim report out of the Research Station fairly soon. He had no intention of waiting until those rodents had multiplied into the fifth generation.

'Perhaps,' said Miss Theta, 'you would like to see the mice?'

The mice in Room G were housed in exactly the same way as the rats in room F, but the number in each cage was much greater, and the little bleached

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creatures were irresistibly reminiscent of the crawling corruption of maggots in a piece of overturned turf about which Stevenson soliloquized in *Pulvis et Umbra*. There had already been a number of fatalities amongst the mice, chiefly from pneumonia complicated by cannibalism, but the deaths were distributed amongst the various lots, and there was nothing to show that there had been any unusual mortality amongst those fed on 'SUNSAP'.

'A little overcrowding does not matter,' explained Miss Theta, 'we are not using the method of convulsions.'

The rabbits in room H were not so numerous, there were only about twenty of them, one in each cage, very fat, very fluffy, and very, very sleepy. Miss Theta said they were not new material, as they had been used before, but they would do very well for the blood tests. She demonstrated how nature had considerably provided the rabbit with an exposed vein at the tip of its ear, from which blood can be drawn off quickly and painlessly as required.

'We have tea here at four o'clock in the hall,' she remarked, looking at her wrist watch.

All the university accents in the country were to be heard in the hall. Tall young men from Cambridge leaned spinelessly against the tea urns; middle-aged professors, who were rather deaf, sat reposefully smoking pipes; and mathematical-looking young women watched Oxford versus Cambridge playing ping-pong, with an excitement that was wholly artificial

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and unconvincing. Pry, who had no small talk, and could only speak of what happened to interest him at the moment—which was then experiments on animals—soon learned that one of the most rigorously observed conventions of the place was that one did not talk 'shop' at tea-time. One practised humour: clean, harmless, innocent fun—like *Punch*. He heard one supposedly funny story about a motor car that always ran itself into a garage and locked the door when its owner left it about, and someone recited a bit of '*The Hunting of the Snark*'. To all this Pry responded with a face full of blank perplexity; and as he couldn't for the life of him think of any little rhymes, he sat, silently apologized for by Miss Theta. When the workers drifted back to their laboratories he took his leave.

As he walked out of Pipperhay, along the Essex lanes, Pry noticed with a sense of novelty that the winter had lifted off the countryside, and lighter shafts of spring were in the sky; there were sturdy lambs in the fields. It was already April. And it seemed to Pry that he had never before looked on the emergence of the spring and felt so indifferent. It was as though a film had descended over his eyes; and the processes of his mind, like the wheels of a clock wound up, went round and round incessantly with thoughts about his work. For nearly six months he had scarcely looked up from it, and he had not noticed how its excitements had been drawing on his nervous energy. He walked on and on, in the general direction of East Bullock, which was twenty miles away, hoping that the walk might clear his head.

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How to get 'SUNSAP' tried on larger animals than rats? How to determine the price at which it could be sold? How to sell it on the all-important home market, with the Graball agreement blocking the way? How to get the new plant built? How to deal with the incessant demands of the Board for schemes, estimates, proposals, provisional arrangements? How far to play their game of building with paper and anticipation, to count chickens before even the hens were bought? How to proceed from the first commercial synthesis of simple sugars to starches and proteins, to foods of greater value? How to reply to the long categorical questionings of the foreign agents? How to mend and cut and start anew the Company's Continental relations? Above all, how to manage when he had to go abroad, to treat with Directors of great foreign companies, in circumstances of influence and luxury of which he was desperately afraid? All these things lay before him to do, at times they crowded upon him and gave him no rest.

And each separate matter, as he did sort it out, was complicated in unbelievable ways by the unpractical and conflicting demands of the several factions of the Board. The new plant, for example, was not much of a constructional job; he had suggested that they should get tenders from three good firms, and then let the selected firm do the job under penalty if they exceeded the contract time. But now the Kosoff faction wanted the plant made by the Kosoff process, and Mr. Cloacher, supported by Kosoff, had indignantly rejected Pry's suggestion that he should prepare an

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estimate and state a completion time for comparison with those of outside firms. He said it was a waste of time and an insult to himself. So the Board wrangled on and on about it with no facts before them, like schoolmen discussing whether a stone falls faster than a feather and never trying the experiment. Then Mr. Cloacher had introduced the idea that the labour cost would be negligible if he only sent men to work on the new plant when business in his garden ornaments department was slack, recalling them to Bingham when orders for more bird baths came in. A suggestion which greatly appealed to the Board, but which any practical man could see was totally stupid and ridiculous. The whole proposal was a maddening waste of time, for Pry knew that tanks made by the Kosoff process would never hold water, that they invariably cracked in contraction and that, whatever the Board might decide, no plant would or could ever be made by the Kosoff process.

It was at that point in his reflections that Pry saw the camels. He had wandered on to a footpath, crossing some fields parallel with the road, and he saw the camels in slow procession beyond the hedge. After the camels came two elephants and a llama. Pry rubbed his eyes. Then he strolled over to the hedge, and finding a gap, watched the rest of the circus pass on its way. He laughed and went striding on more quickly, whistling and idly wondering what he might encounter next. He was unconscious of the miracle that had happened: his head was clear, he was no longer thinking about 'SUNSAP'. He walked on for

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seven miles, perceptive of the grey and warm black tones of the roadside scene when it became dark, feeling, in a pleasantly sentimental mood, that these shadowy cottages were the homes of his countryfolk, his people, and that the whole beloved countryside was in some mysterious sense his own. It was cool and his shoes rang gaily on the road. Later, when he was thinking only of ways and means of getting home, quite suddenly out of nowhere he got two bright ideas. First, he would ask for the help of the Ministry of Food; secondly, he saw the whole gambit of the Kosoff sample tank.

The gambit was a brilliant one, it could not fail. He had authority from the Board to make as much 'SUNSAP' as he considered necessary for the purpose of tests on animals. Very well, that would necessitate a new reaction tank, at once. A concrete tank. But he would not dream of having it made by outside people, it must be made by the Kosoff process. Oh, and it wouldn't be wasted, because singularly enough, it would have to be exactly the same size as one of the tanks for the new plant. It could be moved there later. It was an insignificant morsel for the Board to swallow . . . 'Of course Mr. Cloacher would be only too pleased . . .' Mr. Cloacher would *have* to make that tank. And as it would never hold water, he, Pry, would not have to make a gallon more 'SUNSAP' than he had originally intended on the experimental gear; he would be able to complain of a set-back in his programme; the unsuitability of Kosoff construction for the new plant would be exposed; and the proposal

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would die a natural death. The Board would never see through it, and afterwards they would say it was Providence.

Pry lost no time in asking for the tank. He supported his request with all the plausible arguments he could think of, never betraying the slightest doubt that the Kosoff tank would not be as perfect as a tank could be. To save time he made a working drawing of the tank for the Board to hand to Mr. Cloacher with their instructions. As he had anticipated, his request was instantly granted. Mr. Cloacher received the drawing very sullenly, and immediately suggested that the dimensions should be altered. Pry explained gently that the size of the tank was irrevocably fixed by what had to go in it, but that the thickness of the walls of the tank and their reinforcement were not shown on the drawing, as they would naturally depend on the properties of the Kosoff constructional material, with which he, Pry, was not familiar. Mr. Cloacher could make the walls as thick or as thin as he liked, the only requirements being that the tank should not be too heavy to be brought to East Bullock on a ten-ton lorry, and that it should hold water.

But the Board had something more to occupy its corporate mind than mere details of tanks, or indeed the construction of the new plant. They had committed themselves to drawing on the Company's unpaid capital; which meant that the unfortunate preference shareholders, who had already paid sixteen shillings each for one pound shares (now quoted at

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one and sixpence halfpenny on the Stock Exchange), would have to pay up another shilling on each share. Not only would they have to pay up; but they would be forcibly reminded that there was not one shilling but *four* shillings uncalled on each share, and that this call might be only a first instalment. Having already informed these shareholders in the last Annual Report that at least three-quarters of the capital they had originally subscribed was totally lost, the invitation to subscribe further money needed a nice choice of words to make it appear attractive, and in this the Directors were hamstrung by the necessity of guarding their future liberties of citizenship very carefully. They had to act in what would legally pass as 'in good faith'. They could not hold out any very rosy prospect of returns from this new investment. They had gone as far as they dared in genuine, but all too sanguine faith in the Kosoff and Cocaine processes in the past, and a recrudescence of enthusiasm for 'SUNSAP' was certain to fall on stony ground. The safest thing was to indicate that if the shareholders did not respond promptly to the call they would certainly lose the whole of the money they had already put up, but with the additional capital they had a chance of recouping what was lost and perhaps even seeing a dividend some day. In any case they had got to pay up under the terms of their participation in the Company. It was to cover themselves and to shift some of the responsibility in this financially unpleasant matter, that the Board had invited the principal preference shareholders to form a committee and decide for themselves. Thus it was

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that Mr. Leary had been co-opted on the Board and also Mr. Ketch, who represented Deferred Dividends Trusts. Fortunately for 'Sugar from the Air', Pry had somehow succeeded in creating in Mr. Leary at least, that complex of self-deception, hope, suspended judgment and cupidity which goes by the name of 'Confidence'. And Mr. Leary and the Chairman were the working front of the Board.

'I have been considering,' said Mr. Leary to Pry, over coffee at the Nominal Club in St. James's, 'what to do about Mr. and Messrs. Graball of Dimchester. The agreement with Graball, Sons & Co. gives them sole selling rights over the British Empire for ten years and thirty-five per cent commission on every sale, plus expenses. Another agreement with Mr. Graball himself appoints him Commercial and Technical Adviser to this Company with a retaining fee of eight hundred and fifty pounds a year plus an overriding commission of five per cent on everything his firm may sell and plus his personal expenses. Has Mr. Graball ever given this Company any advice?'

'None,' said Pry, 'except to give the agency for the whole British Empire to his own Company. And according to that he's not obliged to do anything, only *use his best endeavours to sell* certain fabulous quantities of synthetic syrup each year — two thousand five hundred tons this year, for example. The whole thing is a legacy from the time of the original promotion when Klamac and his crowd had to provide the Board with an "agent" at any price, and Mr. Graball helped himself with both hands. The whole thing is iniquitous

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and we might as well shut down now, unless we can tell Mr. Graball to go to the devil; with all that loaded on the price "SUNSAP" will be impossible to sell.'

'Unfortunately such considerations do not affect the legal operation of the agreements. The Company's solicitors advise us that they are still enforceable in law.'

'Then the Company's solicitors can't be much good; why did they permit the Company to sign such agreements in the first place?'

'Their function is only to give legal effect to the decisions of the Board, they have no responsibility. This is no time to launch an attack on the Company's solicitors, they have acted for the Company from the beginning.'

'I should say that was the worst possible recommendation for continuing to employ them.'

Mr. Leary laughed. 'Solicitors occupy a privileged position. And we can't ask the Board to do anything so dramatic as changing the Company's solicitors, they must be kept calm. But the point is, are you in need of any advice from Mr. Graball?'

'Certainly not — but I notice he has never yet been asked to give any.'

'I am glad you say that, for I have decided to take the responsibility of suspending the agreements and not paying Mr. or Messrs. Graball another penny, at any rate until you have "SUNSAP" ready for sale. I suppose he has no useful influence with the Ministry of Food that would help you with your biological tests?'

'Apparently none, but I'll be able to tell you more

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about that in a day or two. I now propose to approach the Ministry of Food. If they are interested it would be something to tell the shareholders in the circular letter you are sending with the call notices?"

'Yes, yes, by all means do that,' said Mr. Leary.

Pry went to the Ministry of Food. He filled in a number of forms, was ushered down innumerable corridors from one waiting room into another, and was at last interviewed by a sub-commissioner. That personage agreed that the manufacture of food from the gases of the atmosphere was of undoubted interest, but he rebuked Pry for thinking that the Ministry were able to take any part in the determination of the fitness for sale or otherwise of proprietary foodstuffs, which must rest on the responsibility of the manufacturers concerned. He went on to say that even if the Ministry were able to take such part they would not be disposed to do so in his case, as the production of sugar from the home atmosphere would create difficulties under the Johannesburg Agreements, it would affect the import quotas of sugar-producing territories within and without the Empire and would thus raise political issues. The production of beet sugar, Mr. Pry would understand, was already heavily subsidized, and the production of sugar from the atmosphere came, he felt, rather into the spheres of action of the Ministry of Industries and the Meteorological Department; he would give Mr. Pry yellow chits to take to those places if he desired. But for his own part he had gravely to warn Mr. Pry that sugar

## SUGAR IN THE AIR

is a dutiable commodity and that it would be his duty to inform the Excise Authorities of the nature of the activities at East Bullock. Pry emerged from the interview with a feeling that so far as the Ministry were concerned, it would be much the best to stop what they were doing forthwith. But the sub-commissioner had mentioned that if he liked he could refer to the Ministry's Research Officer and Director of Nutrition, Dr. Lentil, of Hampton Court.

Not to be discouraged, Pry went off at once to Hampton Court and found Dr. Lentil, who proved much more accessible. Although he had no appointment, Pry was only kept waiting for ten minutes, and that in a small museum of preserved beans, potatoes, grain and sweet corn, which was not uninteresting. Dr. Lentil's room was one half a laboratory and one half a government office, very expressive of Dr. Lentil's position as an intermediary between research and bureaucracy. Dr. Lentil was a small, middle-aged man, a scientist of some distinction, but without the least 'side'. He exercised the privilege of smoking a briar pipe during working hours and was informal in manner.

'I quite agree,' said Dr. Lentil, 'if you can really make sugar from the atmosphere, or waste gases of power stations, it is a matter of very great national importance; but we have certain things to do here, which are defined by the regulations, and we have no authority to undertake investigations of the products of such discoveries as yours. In my opinion it is a very great pity there is no official provision for such investi-

## CONCERNING WHITE RATS

gations, and I and certain of my colleagues have brought pressure on the Government to obtain such provision for many years, but without success. It is a question, you see, of spending public money on behalf of private enterprise.'

'Could we not pay for the investigations?' Pry asked.

'Ah, no, I'm afraid not. Government servants must not receive payment from private bodies for work in their official capacity.'

'And the deadlock is complete?'

'Not quite,' and here Dr. Lentil smiled as he stuffed a fresh charge in his pipe. 'I could write to one or two of my friends, who might make *unofficial* trials, if I were satisfied that what you have is genuine, and I am inclined to think it is, from Dr. Zaareb's specification which you have shown me.'

'Then you will help?'

'I will have a look at the stuff myself first, unofficially, and if I am satisfied, I will. But you must keep this to yourself. You have to realize that although my friends and I are government servants, we were research workers before we became government servants, and a great many of the useful new products of industry owe their adoption to investigations, freely undertaken, without official sanction, and at their own trouble and expense by government research workers, purely in the cause of Science and what they privately conceive to be the public good. To put it bluntly, what you have to do is to interest such people as myself, and cajole us into doing a lot of work for nothing.'

## SUGAR IN THE AIR

'That seems hardly fair.'

'Maybe not. But if you approach the people whose names I shall give you, and tell them the truth, you will be surprised at the amount of help they will give you, if your stuff is good. Your trials on rats and mice are all very well, and Dr. Sinus is a first-class man, but you must know what the stuff will do to livestock, pigs and cattle, under practical farming conditions. How about Ireland, the North and the Free State? Their agricultural workers are amongst the most progressive in Europe, you must go over and see them. And who are your selling agents: Graball and Sons of Dimchester? A little local firm; they are not unenterprising, but they know a good deal more about Derby Brights than they do about sugar; you must go and see the research workers yourself, don't leave any of that to Messrs. Graball's.'

Pry had no intention of doing anything of the kind, and in reporting this conversation to Mr. Leary, he enlarged a little on Dr. Lentil's disaffection for Messrs. Graball's. The delicate business of cajoling research workers and travelling about the British Isles sounded very attractive, and he was going to keep that for himself.

'Do you think,' he asked Mr. Leary, 'I was so indifferently received by the sub-commissioner because of my lack of influence? Couldn't some of our marquises and brigadier-generals, and M.P.s on the Board pull a few strings?'

'The Chairman has already spoken to the Minister

## CONCERNING WHITE RATS

of Food, and I have a letter here in which he suggests that our technical men should go and see Dr. Lentil. You have anticipated the result of the influential approach.'

'Well, so much for that, "She might have known that she alone would have to plant her corn".'

'I beg your pardon.'

'Oh, it's nothing, just a bit of jingle from one of Disney's Silly Symphonies, queer how they stick in one's mind.'

'I rarely go to the cinema, not that I have any objection to it, but because of this troublesome affliction of my eyes. My wife and I have a wireless set in our home, we are Methodists, but we enjoy all kinds of choral services. We have recently had an extension put into the kitchen for our maid.'

The conversation with the hard-boiled Mr. Leary did sometimes dip in this way, leaving Mr. Pry uneasy and embarrassed until it came back to business again. It was impossible that he should say anything of what he really thought about the cinema, the B.B.C. or choral services to Mr. Leary, and, unable to say what he thought, no word would rise to his lips. But it was on this occasion that, provoked by the picture of domestic life that Mr. Leary's words had conjured up, Pry first thought of Mr. Leary as 'Jesus O'Leary', and so great was the descriptive force of the nickname in his mind, that from then on he never ceased to think of him except by it, and had sometimes the greatest difficulty in preventing it from slipping out in conversation.

## SUGAR IN THE AIR

With interviews, meetings and telephone conversations, in a spate of talk and reports and correspondence the weeks went on; waiting weeks — waiting for things that did not matter, like the tank from the Bingham works, and for things that did matter, like Miss Theta's first report. Sometimes floundering, but always exploring ways and means, Pry began to expand, diffidently and cautiously into his new powers. He began to 'breathe upon' 'SUNSAP', and to influence others with his own enthusiasm; the world became a system of channels of *vulgarization* for 'SUNSAP', channels along which he would presently make 'SUNSAP' flow, from East Bullock to the ends of the earth. His confidence in this was unshakeable, and because his words had the quality of conviction he succeeded very well in interesting and holding the attention of people, however 'influential' and 'important' they might be. His inexperience, youthfulness and lack of social position often helped him, for the tendency of people to patronize him for those negative qualities gave him a position of advantage. The Board smiled at the expressions he used in correspondence, but rarely altered them. Those Directors who took any interest in the business at all were startled and horrified by the length of a report he prepared called 'A Preliminary Investigation of some Potential Markets for "SUNSAP"'. But they drew freely from this and other of Pry's reports for the letter they sent to the preference shareholders. And the shareholders did pay up, if not cheerfully, at least without much unpleasantness. The Directors of the research stations that Pry visited all

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began by saying they could not possibly investigate 'SUNSAP', but in the end they not only agreed to fit it in somewhere in their programmes, but took Pry all over the stations, explaining to him the nature of the experiments in progress. The work of a Managing Director, for it was that in everything but name, was not proving so terrible after all, and apart from apprehensions about going abroad, which was still a bogey, Pry had only one fear: that by a twist of the wheel, his precious 'SUNSAP' would be taken away from him, and in this his thoughts were focused on the hateful person of Mr. Cloacher.

## CHAPTER XV

### HIGHER ANIMALS

'WATCH them and see how they appreciate their conveniences,' said Dr. O'Sullivan, showing Pry over the piggeries at the Moyne Research Station.

It *was* rather extraordinary. One of the white porkers lying contentedly on the straw in the well-lighted modern pig house, roused himself, looked bored, and got up. He walked slowly over to a channel of concrete at the far side of the pen, which was kept wet and designed for sanitary purposes. When he had relieved himself he ambled back and lay down again on the perfectly clean straw.

'Are they trained to do it?' asked Pry, impressed by an arrangement that obviously saved much labour.

'Not at all, it is a natural instinct, the pig is one of the cleanest of animals.'

Pry was fascinated by the solemn movements of the pigs and unable to keep his eyes off them, as Dr. O'Sullivan conducted him along the raised concrete walk between the pens. They passed through into another building, used for breeding, and rather differently arranged, as the sows had access to a large fenced-off area of grass, on which they were encouraged at times to take exercise.

'The sows are our own pure Moyne Breed,' explained Dr. O'Sullivan, 'but we use a York White Boar. The first cross fattens best.'

## HIGHER ANIMALS

Pry made a note in his note-book, and with a few questions extracted the main facts about the process of pork production: 'The sow is first served by the boar when about nine months old; her pregnancy lasts five months; she suckles the pigs for two months; and about nine days later is again served by the boar. In her first litter she produces eight or nine pigs, and in subsequent litters about twelve. She produces ten litters in rather more than five years, and is then killed for sausage meat, yielding six to nine cwt. of pork worth about one pound per cwt.' A most efficient machine for the production of pork, and a diabolical programme. Pry felt, somehow, that it was one up to the sow, when Dr. O'Sullivan told him she did not always work so mathematically. She sometimes got swine fever, or scour, or worms, or an attack of malingering, and held up the programme.

'Are you disposed to try "SUNSAP" on them?' asked Pry, back again by the fattening pens.

'I am disposed to try anything new, that might be useful in agriculture, but unfortunately the powers above are not always so disposed. I might lose a valuable sow.'

As he could not offer to pay for the sow, persuasion was a little difficult for Pry.

'If it fails you lose a sow, and may have to face criticism for an unauthorized experiment; if it succeeds you will have been the first man ever to have fed pigs on food from the air. That is the gamble, is it worth your while? But need you risk a sow, wouldn't one weakly pig or a "squealer" do for a start?'

## SUGAR IN THE AIR

O'Sullivan pulled himself up abruptly. 'You're a rotten sportsman, and if that's the way you make experiments over there, it isn't ours in this distressful country. Either the thing's worth doing properly or I shan't touch it at all.'

Pry was silent.

'It's one thing to come with a sporting proposition, but quite another to ask me to mess about with a sickly pig. I'll see you and your "SUNSAP" in hell first.'

They walked back towards the laboratories.

'I could try your stuff in one way only: it would have to be incorporated in the ration of a first-class sow from the date of service until the pigs are weaned, and then it would have to be fed to the whole litter of pigs until they were sold to the bacon factory. Can you assure me it's safe to do that?'

'No,' said Pry, 'I can't. Dr. Sinus's preliminary report shows that it has done no harm to rats and mice so far, the first litters are numerically a little better than usual, that's the only indication I can give you.'

'You don't seem to have much faith in your own stuff?'

'What would you think of me if I tried to argue from these results on rats and mice that the stuff cannot be harmful to pigs?'

'H'm,' said O'Sullivan. 'I certainly don't put much weight on that sort of evidence, there's bloody little that mice *can't* eat.'

'My wife has a book at home that the mice have chosen, they've already eaten half of it, and we've put it back for them to finish; it is, or was, Stopford Brooke's *Primer of English Literature*.'

## HIGHER ANIMALS

‘Never heard of him, but I can well believe it.’

The conversation deteriorated into general remarks about the luminous weather then prevailing over County Wicklow and the remarkable fairness of the scenery round the pig station. Pry was gloomily reflecting that he had made a hopeless bodge of the interview.

‘When you say your stuff is made from the air you don’t mean that, do you? Isn’t it a fancy way of saying that it’s made from the flue gases of your power stations, a new by-product of your English industrialism?’

‘If we didn’t take them, the gases would go into the air; it comes to the same thing.’

‘No, it doesn’t. Why do you think we ought to be interested in feeding our Irish pigs on the smoke from your English coal? We haven’t any coal mines. You people think we Irish are a lot of imbeciles, that can only talk blarney and are still half savage; why do you come to us to make experiments for you? Speak up, man.’

‘I came to you because of your reputation amongst scientific workers, and if it comes to talking blarney, I’m as much a London Cockney as you are an Irishman.’

O’Sullivan’s very humane endeavour was only to take a rise out of the earnest Mr. Pry. And in what followed Pry certainly got the worst of it. The only thing that Pry wanted to say was: ‘Are you going to test “SUNSAP” or aren’t you?’ and that O’Sullivan gave him no opportunity to say.

‘Mind,’ said O’Sullivan at last, ‘I’m not going to do this because I like your face, but fortunately for you,

## SUGAR IN THE AIR

your "SUNSAP" is a lot more interesting than you are. Send me two hundred gallons, and I'll *give* you the sick pig to take home with you.'

Pry almost jumped from his chair with excitement and gratitude.

'What a white-livered lot you are,' remarked O'Sullivan with friendliness, as though reading Pry's thoughts '... I'll come with you to the station, I'm going that way.'

'This is the place,' said O'Sullivan unexpectedly, as they were about to pass 'Donnan's Medical Hall', a shop with a decayed frontage and a dark interior, part chemist and part general stores. At the back of the shop, behind a half screen, was a bar, and even as they stood before it, it had not yet entered Pry's mind that O'Sullivan was going to buy him a drink.

'This is Mr. Pry from London,' said O'Sullivan, grandly introducing him to the green-aproned Mr. Donnan, owner of the 'Hall'. 'Mr. Pry is a great chemist, he makes potheen out of the air, can you beat that? Two double Jamesons....' Later, whilst he waited on Moyne Station to see Pry off on the Dublin train, O'Sullivan said: 'It would have been pretty awkward for you, after coming all this jaunt, to go back and tell your Directors there was nothing doing.'

Pry got no sleep that night; it was calm in the Irish Channel, and he walked about the boat deck watching the Holyhead light blinking across the decreasing distance of untroubled sea. He was elated, and life seemed strangely full; the generosity of O'Sullivan had

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touched him, and he kept saying to himself: 'O'Sullivan has spoken', 'O'Sullivan has spoken for the Irish Free State'. He could not sleep in the hot train; when he closed his eyes, he saw the shafts of mild sunshine playing over the bright mosses on the slopes of the Wicklow mountains, or a dozen white pigs struggling to get at the teats of an uncomplaining white sow . . . 'The first cross fattens best . . . 'In nine days she is again served by the boar' . . . 'Send me two hundred gallons' . . . 'Two double Jamesons' . . . 'What a white-livered lot you are . . .' Feeling as tender as though he had been boiled, nodding now and then into sleep, but still very elated, Pry went directly to the works, eager for news that might await him, for his visit to O'Sullivan had been part of a tour, and he had been away for nearly a week.

When he reached the factory a lorry was discharging a lot of rusted iron and rubble on to the newly-sown grass plot which he and Ackworth had been encouraging by the front entrance, and when he went in, a new girl, whom he had not seen before, was sitting at the telephone exchange. Miss Rosewood had moved to a far corner of the office. At once wide awake, angry and up in arms, Pry walked into his office, shut the door and asked Ackworth the meaning of it all.

'I couldn't get in touch with you, and all I know is that the second day after you left Cloacher's men came here with a load of stuff, and started moving in. Cloacher himself has been here stamping about and swearing, telling me to mind my own business, as he had arranged it all with the Board.'

## SUGAR IN THE AIR

‘What have they done?’

‘They’re filling up C Bay with core boxes and loads of sand and cement, you never saw such a mess; our grass in front is all mucked up; and now it’s spreading out the back: lots of shuttering and old iron. I’ve locked up the experimental gear and kept them out of that, it was all I could do. There’s been a woman here too, an old Salvation Sal, asking the men a lot of questions behind my back.’

‘Kick open that door, will you, I’m going to get through to the Chairman.’ He asked the new telephone girl for the Chairman’s number at his London residence, watched her as she obtained it, and then ordered her away from the exchange.

‘Ah, good morning, Mr. Pry,’ came the smooth voice of Lord Lambsbottam. ‘Back already, I hope you have had a pleasant journey?’

‘Very pleasant and very satisfactory for the Company,’ said Pry, grimly. ‘But I return here to find Mr. Cloacher in occupation of the works . . .’

‘Ah that, yes, Mr. Pry, I feel I owe you some explanation. I should have told you about that before. As you are aware, our Company finds itself faced with a very difficult situation, and for reasons of economy it has been decided to close down the Bingham works and transfer a part of it, a part only, to East Bullock. It would have been my personal wish to refer to you before giving effect to the decision of the Board, but Mr. Cloacher felt that moving should commence immediately . . .’

‘Immediately I had left the place for a few days?’

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'Come, you must not take it like that, I am sure that Mr. Cloacher was not influenced by any such consideration. We must all pull together if we are to get over our difficulties; let me know if there is anything you would like done to avoid disorganizing your work in any way; there is one point in connection with this moving that you, I am sure, will be the first to appreciate. The presence of Mr. Cloacher, on the spot, as it were, will facilitate his erection of your new plant for you, my co-directors and I had that in mind. Your interests had not been forgotten.'

'Our interests have not been forgotten,' said Pry, turning to Ackworth, when he had put down the receiver, 'the Chairman says if we don't like it we can put up with it. Effect has been given to the decision of the Board. What do *you* think about Mr. Cloacher?'

'Wouldn't touch the bugger with a barge pole.'

'Then no discussions, no arguments, nothing he can get hold of. He's got to have C Bay. But we keep him out of the rest of the works, and that goes for Mrs. Block and all his gang, you understand?'

'Suits me.'

A pile of letters had accumulated in Pry's absence. They had been opened and read by Mr. Cloacher. Pry turned them over, unable to read them. What did they matter; what did anything matter; what was the use . . . He went into the works and started the men on packing the two hundred gallons of "SUNSAP" for the pigs of Moyne, then he walked through C Bay. The men from Bingham were standing about in groups amongst the stock in trade of the Garden Ornaments Department,

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chatting and smoking Woodbines. Mrs. Block, in a flouncy salmon-coloured dress, broke off what appeared to be an intimate chat with one of the moulders, and stared inquiringly at Pry.

'Is there no one in charge here?' he demanded of her.

'Mr. Cloacher can't do everything himself, I have come down here for him, to keep an eye on things, you know....'

'I see,' said Pry; and he resumed his tour of inspection. He examined the electricity cables feeding the batteries of mercury vapour lamps in the neighbouring bay, and going to the switchboard, found some enamelled plates bearing a skull and cross-bones with the words: HIGH TENSION — DANGER TO LIFE. The cables did not carry any particularly high tension, but that did not matter. He hung the plates between the columns which marked out C Bay from the adjoining one. He regarded them for a moment or two, and then returning to the switchboard knocked out the main breaker and took away certain fuses, which he locked up. He was recalled to the office to answer the telephone: it was Mr. Leary.

'The Chairman told me you were back, and I'm getting in touch with you in case you should feel a little hurt about what has happened in your absence. Can you manage to come to lunch with me to-day at the Nominal Club, that is if you are not too tired. And by the way, there's no need to mention this to Mr. Cloacher....'

'Excuse me for one moment,' said Pry, and he opened the door into the general office. Mrs. Block was standing by the telephone exchange, listening in to the

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conversation through the spare headphones. 'Hullo!' he continued, returning to the phone, with the door open: 'Mrs. Block is intercepting this call, no doubt on behalf of Mr. Cloacher; she has heard what has been said, perhaps you would like to speak to her.' Mrs. Block pulled off the headphones hurriedly and with something about being insulted, flounced angrily out of the office. 'She's gone now....' continued Pry.

At the Nominal Club Mr. Leary was all smiles. 'Prawn salad?' he said. Pry thought that would be excellent. 'And to drink?' Pry really thought that as Mr. Leary was paying for it, a good hock, which he liked, would be suitable — but he said 'Bass', having observed that to call for beer instead of wine is safe, and may be taken as a manly preference, though in fact he disliked the stuff very much.

Mr. Leary raised his eyebrows, 'Bass?' he said. 'Well of course there is no harm in a little intoxicant when it is taken with food ... by all means have Bass if you like . . .'

'Oh, no,' said Pry hurriedly, 'I'll have some tonic water.'

During lunch, which went on to creamed chicken, plum tart and cheese, and was so plentiful it would lay any but City men out for the rest of the afternoon, they did not talk business. Mr. Leary enlarged on the difficulty of dealing with the Irish, with anecdotes from Cromwell to Carson.

When they had passed into the lounge for coffee, Mr. Leary said: 'I can understand your being jealous of Mr. Cloacher, but I cannot see why he should be

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jealous of you, he is so much older than you are, and he has had so much more experience.'

'Mr. Cloacher has no qualities of which I am jealous. What do you really want to say to me?'

'I was afraid there might be this difficulty; it arises unavoidably from the differences in your mentalities.'

'You wish to put Mr. Cloacher in charge of the whole works?'

'No, no, you must not think that, but we must envisage certain rearrangements to prevent overlapping of function, you will see yourself that we cannot have two separate organizations under one roof.'

'I can see no reason why the Board has broken faith with me.'

'There has never been any question of breach of faith.'

'No? I return this morning to find my correspondence opened, my staff displaced, my telephone calls intercepted and people moving into the factory without reference to me. . . .'

'Come, Mr. Pry, you know that it never entered the mind of the Board that you might object; their only desire is to assist you; you will have all you can do travelling about the country and continuing your researches. Mr. Cloacher has been the first to appreciate the load that falls on your shoulders, and he has freely volunteered to relieve you of the mere routine job of looking after the works. In order to conserve working capital for your "SUNSAP" we have had to close down the Bingham works and utilize the vacant space at East Bullock.'

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'Without so much as asking me what space is vacant? and how the factory could best be divided?'

'You speak of dividing the factory: that is exactly what we wish to avoid, there must be as far as possible one staff and one organization for both processes.'

Pry sipped his coffee in silence, a feeling of sickness and hopelessness possessed him. It was useless to argue. He accepted another cigarette from Mr. Leary and presently said:

'I probably prevented a fatal accident by coming back this morning. If unskilled men wander about amongst our high-tension apparatus they will kill themselves; I have cut off the current; and shall not accept responsibility for putting it on again until the two parts of the building are divided by a proper partition from the floor to the roof — that will also serve to keep the grit and the cement out of our syrup.'

'The Board were not advised that that was necessary.'

'You did not ask me, who alone could have told you.'

'It must be done, of course . . . any reasonable request like that . . .'

'And the same thing applies to the land, where the semi-electric solar radiation plant is to be erected: there must be an unclimbable wire fence all the way from the back of the works to the river.'

Mr. Leary made a note of this also.

'The new processes we are developing are not protected by patents: the secret part of the processes is to be made known?'

'I do not follow your meaning.'

'I mean that I want written authority from the Board

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before permitting Mr. Cloacher, Mrs. Block or any of the Bingham men to see the processes in operation. Until then the experimental plant must stand idle.'

Mr. Leary smiled. 'You negotiate as though you were a foreign power, you must know that the Board would never commit themselves to giving such authority.'

'All the more reason why I should not give it, as a mere employee of the Company.'

'You mean that you want the works divided into water-tight compartments and you must have control over your own staff?'

'Yes, and the interception of my correspondence and telephone calls is also a matter the Board might consider.'

'I am glad we have had this talk: subject to the Board's agreement on these points, you would co-operate with Mr. Cloacher?'

'I shall be scrupulously courteous and polite to Mr. Cloacher.'

'Despising him too much to be rude to him, eh?'

'I did not say that.'

## CHAPTER XVI

## OBSTACLES UNDERMINED

LIFE had not been very kind to Mr. Cloacher: the son of a cartage contractor, who had made a bit of money trading in broken pit ponies, and later in hunting cobs, George Cloacher, who was the only legitimate son of his father, had been brought up as a tout. In this capacity he had struck up acquaintanceships with the wasters from a number of 'county' families, and acquired from them vices he could not afford; he had also learned to speak when it suited him, in their way, and this, added to his few years' perfunctory attendance at a village school, was all he had by way of education. He had not bothered to work up the horse business, as the 'Gov'ner' would have to die sooner or later and he would come into the property. The 'Gov'ner' let him down badly, for when he did die he left the horse business to a woman with whom he had been living, and George got only a little house property for his share. But soon the war came, and he managed to cadge his way, through 'county' influence, into a job of buying cavalry horses for the Government, at which he made some easy money. With this, and what he got for the house property when prices were high, he started in business on his own as a jerry builder. The business dragged on for a while and then went bankrupt. He was forced to crawl by the back stairs into one toadying job after another, a

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precarious livelihood, with many kicks in the pants, but his natural qualities, a taste for jobs not quite on the level, and his 'county' background were sufficient qualifications, he had no wife or children, and he would have managed well enough, were it not for the money he had to pay out to women more businesslike than himself. Mr. Cloacher had other encumbrances than his carbuncle; and the opportunity of stepping into MacDuff's shoes, in the soft-witted Hydro-Mechanical Company, was too good to be missed; he had all the tout's instinctive perception of the weaknesses of the Board and he meant to soap up to them.

So far he had done pretty well: the scandals he had whispered about MacDuff were just what the Board desired to hear, for they still felt uneasy that they might have done wrong in letting him go; the glossing of the unpleasant truth about the Kosoff processes; and his representations that he, as a master builder, with his 'influence' could make the business pay, now that the impostor MacDuff had gone, was again just what the Board desired to hear. It had been his suggestion that the Kosoff constructions should be transferred to East Bullock, to effect the wonderful economy in overheads. Only one thing stuck in his gullet, and that was that sarcastic squirt of a Mr. Pry, and his fancy synthetics, that the Board seemed to regard as their white hope.

In this Mr. Cloacher was quite right, for although the Board took at once to Mr. Cloacher as one of themselves — he was corpulent and bald and properly dressed; he spoke in the right tone — they had nevertheless quite a liking for Mr. Pry, he was tactless, but

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even they saw that he had ability, and he was transparently honest — he sometimes even spoke against his own interests. They were amused that he never showed any sign of being impressed by them. It gave a certain light relief — but there was a very serious side to it also. Mr. Pry had all the technical business about synthetics up his sleeve and it was beyond them to imagine what they could do without him. Mr. Cloacher couldn't be expected to understand all that, for they didn't understand it themselves. And they were committed to going on with the synthetics — it was most important. To patch up something out of the Kosoff Constructions, just to say they were keeping them going, was very necessary, and they were most grateful to Mr. Cloacher. But nothing must be done to prejudice the synthetics. Mr. Pry was touchy, and he must be kept in a good humour until he had laid the golden eggs. Absurd, of course, and he was really quite an impossible person to have at the Board meetings, but there it was.

Pry got his partition down the factory, and the unclimbable wire fence across the land at the back; he retained control of his staff; and he got clear instructions from the Board to Mr. Cloacher that his work was not to be interfered with in any way whatever. At the works, Mr. Cloacher's operations on garden ornaments were confined to C Bay, on the other side of the partition, and the rest of the Kosoff plant was abandoned at Bingham, with the factory — which had not been sold. Mr. Cloacher himself occupied Cocaine's old office; Pry passed him occasionally on his way through

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the general office, and Mrs. Block was quietly snubbed by Miss Rosewood for presuming to take an interest in her 'salvation', but there was no other contact between the two parties; they settled down, with an effective partition between them, in a state of armed and unstable neutrality, under the same roof.

'What do you think the Board will do next?' Pry asked Zaareb, who had kept rather aloof from the strategy of this reshuffle.

'If I knew what they'll do next, I should be as mad as they are, let us talk sense for a change: when is a start going to be made on the new plant?'

'We are waiting for Mr. Cloacher to make the sample tank, which never will be made, to show the Board that the new plant can't be made by Kosoff Constructions, which everyone knows already.'

'This is *lunacy*!'

'Or deliberate procrastination; but even so, the Board has not yet decided that the plant is to be built by Mr. Cloacher; once that happens, we are finished, we shall never see our plant.'

Zaareb shook his head, and, unable to stand any more, led the way into the lab. The analysis of "SUN-SAP" had been taken almost as far as was necessary; the manufacturing methods for the new plant had been worked out as far as they could be without the plant itself; ways of purifying the syrup had been examined; the yield of by-products was too small yet to do much with them. They were waiting, now, for the results of the experiments on animals, and the new plant.

'We could very well start on something else,' said

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Dr. Zaareb, 'although I must say there is not much inducement.'

'Make starch for example, or get nitrogen in somewhere, for amino-acids and the proteins?'

'You open your mouth too wide: I can't produce ways of doing these things out of my hat. The blue catalyst was a stroke of luck, and I admit I never anticipated it would work with your low temperature heat. But that sort of luck doesn't come twice in the same investigation: the approach to starch is going to be slow, and I can't promise you any success. I am not a magician.'

'But to work on it would give us something the folly of the Board could not touch. I must have something to hold this team together.'

'That is not the spirit for successful research; but I agree that you must all have something fresh to do, until you can get the new plant started, I said so myself. We'll tackle the starch.'

Pry's defences were strengthening: he reported to the Board that they had begun the synthesis of starch; sketched for them the dazzling profitable possibilities if this research should be successful; used Zaareb's half-hearted decision, to spellbind the Board. Research is a sensitive plant, they would be afraid not to leave it alone.

Whitsun came and passed. The bare sticks in the garden of Snoot House had expanded into a fullness of greenery. Surprisingly, there had been lilac, and haw-

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thorn bloom, and now there were dog roses, thin above sprawling brambles by the shed. Sometimes, in the early morning, there were skylarks singing over the marshes. Mary and Pry had made one or two expeditions, walking by Thaxted or Maldon: but now Mary could no longer accompany him, it was her sixth month, and the baby was already heavy. Mary was happy, almost ecstatic sometimes, a new grace and tenderness had come to her. Pry told her something about the conflict with Cloacher, but only the absurdities of the situation, only the rather bitter fun, from which he made out that he always emerged laughing, always getting the better of Cloacher and the Board. Mary was no fool, and he did not wholly deceive her, but she did not know the anguish with which he watched and fore-saw the slow intrusion and usurpation by Mr. Cloacher of that which he had made his own. Mary had resigned from her school and she would not be able to teach again. She did not know with what anxiety Pry looked to the future; they were living on half his salary; but the savings were still very little: if it should be necessary to resort to Caesarian birth there would not be enough money, and even at the best, there would be little reserve after the doctor and the nursing-home and all the other extras had been paid. If his job should come to an end then, there would be only the piano and the microscope that could be sold. '*SUNSAP*' *must* be successful and Cloacher *must* be kept at bay.

Help came, as always, from an unexpected quarter. Mr. Kosoff, discredited with the other directors through the failure of Kosoff Constructions, not un-

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naturally distrusted and shot at by Mr. Leary and the Preference Shareholders' Committee, saw in Mr. Pry's inexperience of business on the Continent, a new opportunity to be once again in the boil of affairs, to regain influence and power in the reborn hopes of the Company. Mr. Pry was neglecting the Continental agents. They must be visited in their lairs, and he, Kosoff, would accompany Mr. Pry. He would translate everything, use for the Company the golden key of his Continental connections; he would be a Director, where Pry was only an employee. It would be an irresistibly powerful deputation; a director, the promoter himself of a £3,000,000 Company, and the Company's scientist who would say all-you-want about the technicals. . . .

No other director on the Board knew any language but English, and for all they knew of the Continent it might have been the moon. They had not even Pry's ability to read technical French and German. Much as they disliked and mistrusted Kosoff, abomination that he was to Mr. Leary, the polar opposite of anything a Methodist, who was also a chartered accountant, could possibly tolerate, once Kosoff's plan had been put before them, they could see no alternative to it. Only this, that perhaps Klamac might go instead of Kosoff. There was no disputing that Klamac knew the Continent, but it was only Mr. Leary, in hate of Kosoff, who advanced the proposal. For Kosoff was an evil that they to some extent knew: an explosive, troublesome, dangerously sanguine Uranian, liable to deceive everybody with himself, but for all they had ever been able to prove to

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the contrary, an honest man. Whilst Count Klamac . . . Klamac they knew not.

Klamac, hearing of what was brewing, by means more mysterious than the jungle telegraph, wrote at once to the Board, impressing upon them that it should be he who should go, with or without Mr. Pry; no other arrangement could possibly be effective. He took so grave a view of the matter that he was leaving immediately by air for London. The Board, never able to say 'yes' or 'no' except on somebody's advice, it did not much matter whose, decided that they would not see Klamac, but that Mr. Pry should see him and report upon him.

Pry, who knew nothing of the proposal that *anyone* should accompany him abroad received, without a word of explanation, a request that he should interview Count Klamac at Agastral House and express in report form his opinion of that gentleman. Pry, who still retained some capacity for being surprised, was surprised by this: that he, an obscure chemical engineer, should be called upon by a galaxy of marquises, lords, majors, M.P.s, and knights, to interview a suspected company promoter for ten minutes and report, presumably on his honesty and general personal qualities, was staggering. After this if they wanted him to do a music hall turn in tights, or tell fortunes with a horoscope, 'san fairy ann', he'd do it willingly.

His report on Klamac, although extraordinarily brief and disappointing at first sight, probably expressed the most profound truth that could be expressed about the man:

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'I attended at Agastral House this day to interview Count Klamac as requested by the Board. Count Klamac was not there.'

Thinking it over afterwards Pry realized what an extraordinarily good report it was; for, as far as he could see, Count Klamac never *was* there. He was a shadow on the blind, a terror in the dark, a spielman whom no one ever saw.

Then Usidlenie Kosoff visited the works. He was a virile, lemur-like little man, with no strand of grey in his black hair, exquisitely tailored and manicured, and very much alert.

'Ah! Mr. Pry, I have so much pleasure, all is good with you here, you are happy, no?'

'The business is developing satisfactorily.'

'I know, I know, everybody is making some experiments, it will be marvellous success, always marvellous success, but you, you have all-you-want?'

'There are very few people who could say that, Mr. Kosoff.'

'I see you are, how you call, a philosoph. In Urania, my country, we are great philosophs; even the little children, not higher than *so*, they are philosophs. I had in Urania a great estate, many villages, much trees; I travel in my own train, my bailiffs bring to me the accounts, then comes the revolution, I am made to sweep the snow in the streets, but always I am happy, I too am philosoph.'

'I wish you'd do something about getting our new plant put up.'

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‘It is not here already? So much much time, and it is not already put up?’

‘You know perfectly well, Mr. Kosoff, that it is not; we have been waiting for months now, wasting our time. I have told you so at every Board meeting.’

‘There come so many reports; always it is reports, people speak, they speak so much, again and again comes Klamac, and there is finance, you do not know what is finance. The directors have so much, to do so much, it is overslipped in mind, the new plant . . .’

‘How long do you think that is likely to continue?’

‘It shall now immediately be done, to-morrow, perhaps next week, how soon can it be put up, the new plant?’

‘About six weeks, with quick-setting cement and a live firm of contractors.’

‘It is too much, three weeks, not more a day, you must strenulate.’

‘Stipulate?’

‘At once you must strenulate.’

‘I must respectfully remind you, Mr. Kosoff, that it is not in my power to stipulate anything. You have said the new plant must be made by your constructional process; Mr. Cloacher has refused, on one pretext after another, even to make a start on a single tank. I now assume that we shall wait until the time when we shall have to refuse valuable orders because there is no plant, and that then it will be put up at great expense and in a great hurry, after the business has been lost.’

‘At once I come, and I see how it is with you: you are so cold, and you have anger *im Herz*.’

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Pry looked at Mr. Kosoff with a new interest, he seemed to be rather good at hitting bull's-eyes with tangential shots. Save for the glance, which was non-committal, he ignored the remark, and said, 'I was speaking about the plant.'

'In mind there exists the Kosoff Process; it is marvellous process; at once it can do all you want; but in mind only it is; impossible it can not be . . .'

'Oh, I appreciate the difficulty, but couldn't you say our plant cannot now be made by your process, *because the necessary machinery has been abandoned and left at Bingham?* Most unfortunately left at Bingham.'

Mr. Kosoff adjusted his monocle and regarded Mr. Pry approvingly. 'You would like with me to travel, to Paris, to Berlin, to Rome, and everything arrange for the Company? I will like, with you to travel, an Englishman sometimes he is so stupid, but with you I tell me, it is not so. You will write to the Chairman a little exposé, that with me you could go perhaps and everything do the most suitable . . .? And you will not once more ask for the little tank — already eleven times you have asked — but it is nothing, the little tank, you will please all forget, no?'

'In exchange for which I get my new plant?'

'So we do not speak.'

'Bon!' said Pry, for some reason suddenly breaking into pidgin French, 'Entendu!'

The prospect of travelling about the Continent with Kosoff was by no means a disagreeable one; it removed the bugbear of having to adventure forth on the job

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alone; it divided the responsibility, and Kosoff's company would be, to say the least of it, interesting. The romantic element in Pry responded warmly enough to certain streaks in Kosoff. And then, in some ways, it would be like travelling with the Man who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo. The exposé was duly written — remarkable the variety of literary composition Pry now had to produce — and all things considered it was pretty well done.

It caused a storm at the next Board meeting between the faction of the Directors gathering round Kosoff and that entrenched with Mr. Leary and the Shareholders' Committee, but it was so completely independent and seemingly disinterested that neither side could attribute to Mr. Pry any partiality for the other. The Chairman smiled urbanely. Although it was desirable to have someone a little more experienced than Mr. Pry to accompany that young gentleman on the Continent, it was even more desirable to have someone as reliable as Mr. Pry to keep an eye on Kosoff. It was resolved that Mr. Kosoff and Mr. Pry should travel together.

But that was only a prelude to the storm about the plant. Mr. Kosoff, true to his compact with Pry, and incidentally only too glad to be strenuously concerned in this further bit of the Company's affairs, made a complete *volte-face*. Where, a month or so before, he had insisted that the plant must be made by the Kosoff process, he now insisted that it could not be. The new plant must be erected immediately, without a moment's loss of time, by outside contractors. He blamed the

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incredible folly of the Board in closing down the Kosoff factory and abandoning the valuable plant at Bingham, and said that thereby Mr. Cloacher had been prevented from doing the work and had lost a most valuable contract, which would have kept the money in the Company's pocket. The Leary faction retaliated by saying that they had only agreed to the Kosoff business being continued at all, on a reduced scale at East Bullock, on the representation that everything necessary would be retained in the space there available. That the main reason, in fact, for the transfer was that it would facilitate the construction of the new plant by the Kosoff Process, and they took this reversal of policy on the part of Mr. Kosoff as a clear admission that the new plant could not and never could have been made by the Kosoff Process; that that process was a plain swindle from the start; and that if Mr. Kosoff would pay back some of the money he got for it out of the Company in the first place, that would be an equitable way of paying for the erection of the new plant by outside contractors. The situation contained all the elements of a first class row, and everybody directly or remotely concerned was dragged into it. The Solicitors, the Company's Auditors, the Patent Agents, the Shareholders' Committee, Deferred Dividends Trust, all their miscellaneous advisers, and they even had counsel's opinion. But in the end all the Directors retained their seats on the Board, exactly as before, and the contract for the new plant was signed with Industrial Structures and Equipment Ltd. Mr. Cloacher's final contribution to the scrimmage was a suggestion that the Contractors

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should finance the new plant, receiving a small deposit only, and getting the rest only if the plant worked and produced profits. But Mr. John Hodge, Managing Director of Industrial Structures, etcetera, killed the suggestion stone dead with one awful glare. The contract was signed and excavations for the new plant at last were started.

## CHAPTER XVII

## THE NEW PLANT

IT was necessary for Pry to stay at East Bullock whilst the new plant was being erected; Mr. Kosoff discovered to his chagrin that the tour on the Continent had to be delayed. Pry had designed the plant, and no one else could settle with the contractors the innumerable minor practical questions that arose. Mr. Cloacher, though he represented himself to be a builder, kept very clear of this work of construction. But he did call, in the Chrysler car, complete with chauffeur, on the superintendent of the power station and nearly wreck the arrangement on which the whole plant depended, by blabbing something about 'back-pressure' in their chimney, as though that were some advantage for which they ought to pay. Otherwise, except for adversely criticizing the price of everything after the orders had been placed, Mr. Cloacher left Pry and the new plant severely alone. Pry paddled over in the barge to the power station wharf, gossiped a bit about coal, had a cup of tea with his friend Watts, and persuaded the superintendent that far from there being any back pressure there would actually be a slight increase in the draught by reason of the main, and promised that it should be exactly controlled by apparatus at the power station end, which Hydro-Mechanicals would supply and maintain. Mr. Cloacher's intervention on this occasion only cost

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the price of the additional apparatus, and the vital contract with the power station was concluded without further hitch.

Through the rest of June, July and on into August, the site of the new plant was black with the contractors' men; the concrete mixers rattled and tipped; the little impertinent oil engines by which they were driven spat out their noisy exhausts; lorries and oil-driven skip trucks were ceaselessly on the move. A struttled and cross-struttled confusion of timber, unrecognizable as the shell of a building, appeared on the marshes. Into spaces between the shuddering, through which the hooked steel rods of the reinforcement stuck out everywhere, the concrete was poured. Sections of the shuttering were cleared and moved along, exposing the new white concrete — the growing walls and ribs of the new plant. The floor with its maze-like systems of shallow channels was cast, section by section the concrete set and became firm to walk upon. Before a quarter of the concrete shell was finished the installation of the internal gear began. Pry and Ackworth with their team worked with the fitters and the mechanics, dismantling the Cocaine plant, making space for the evaporators and purifiers, and for the storage, filling and loading of barrels — for which, incidentally, no provision whatever had been made in the original factory. A loading bay was built, so that the heavy barrels of 'SUNSAP' could be rolled over the factory floor directly on to the tailboards of lorries. The forest of zigzagging quartz tubes was taken down and sold; they helped to pay for the new plant.

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At home now Pry and Mary were waiting, impatiently and all the time waiting, for something more it seemed than the birth of their child.

'You will not leave me, Ham, when my time comes, you will be there with me?'

'I have told you, Mary, I shall be there. . . .'

But in the next breath she would say: 'No, Ham, you must go away, in September, it's no time for a man to be hanging about, *you* can't do any good.'

By the second week in August the new plant was nearly complete. The pipes from the power station were connected up; the flue gases poured into the first two chambers; the warm water from the power station condensers flowed through pipes, imparting its heat to the solution of the blue catalyst that filled the channels in the floor, before returning, cold, to the river. The rays of the August sun bore down on the curiously inclined roofing of green-tinted glass. A tiny part of the vast energy of solar radiation — 3400 horse-power per acre at that time of the year — trapped in a glass cage. The workmen were already hanging the last of the doors, closing in the first plant ever built that would extract food from the air. A plain, shapely plant, functional to the last detail of its design, its low concrete walls strong and clean, its quarter of an acre of glass glinting mysteriously in the sun and arousing in Pry scarcely controllable emotions of pride, thankfulness and joy.

The Board passed round the photographs of the new plant, smiling and shaking their heads, and never for one moment appreciating the actual extent of it, or the historical significance of what had been done.

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'Now that that is over,' said the Chairman, amiably, 'perhaps your visits with Mr. Kosoff to the Company's Continental agents need not be further delayed. . . .'

'Oh, but the plant must be tested while there is still some sun; the internal gear is not yet complete; everything must be made tight and sound before the contractors go; stocks of "SUNSAP" must be made for the winter. . . .'

Major T. Haw-Stag saw no reason why these details should require Mr. Pry's personal attention — had he not people at the works he could leave them to, Mr. Cloacher, for example — he required to know how long the damned tour with Mr. Kosoff was still further to be delayed.

'About six weeks,' Pry thought, after a mental calculation based not so much on the needs of the plant, as on the fact that the period of human gestation rarely exceeds three hundred days.

'Ridiculous, Mr. Kosoff cannot be kept waiting for *you*. . . .'

'It really does seem to me, speaking for myself,' interposed the Chairman, 'that perhaps you could find a way to oblige the Board by reducing that period. Shall we fix the date of your departure provisionally for three weeks from this day?'

Pry could only assent, but until that baby was born he was not going to go.

The internal arrangement of the new plant was utterly different from Cocaine's old forest of quartz tubes and indeed from the experimental gear. Now the solution of blue catalyst was run into open channels in

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the floor, warmed by waste heat from the power station, and thrown up by pumps into a thousand cascades to mingle with the flue gas in the shallow glass-roofed chambers. The green light filtered from the sun's radiation played on an ocean of foam and spray. Would it work? Would it reproduce the performance in the experimental gear? Anxiously, Pry and Ackworth drew off samples of the irradiated fluid; Dr. Zaareb strolled up and down the alleyways between the glass chambers, feeling the sun's heat on the palms of his hands, criticizing the angles of the roof — they would not be quite right at the winter solstice; there were mechanical troubles, leakages that had to be made good, and then the concentration of the sugar began to creep up . . . five . . . ten . . . fifteen . . . twenty . . . twenty-five per cent. Beyond twenty-five per cent it would not go, the blue catalyst was exhausted. The strength of the syrup was the same as that from the experimental gear, but the time required for the synthesis was greatly reduced, and now five tons had been made in a single batch. The pumps were stopped, the cascades subsided, the syrup was transferred into the old building for concentration and treatment with charcoal and lime.

The weak raw syrup boiled under vacuum, and the fractions of the distillate with the volatile by-products ran in thin streams into glass containers beneath the stills — by-products on which might depend the small margin between profit and loss and the ultimate success of the undertaking, spirituous liquids with at once an acrid and a pervasive, aromatic smell. On the new plant a second charge of catalyst was fed into the mains,

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By night now the baby kicked and struggled like a cat in a bag. It was impatient of the darkness and its warm imprisonment. Pry's three weeks were up.

'Are you fully satisfied about the plant?' asked the Chairman, at the Board meeting when were to be settled the final details about the tour.

'The estimated performance stated in our memorandum of March 23rd has been attained.'

'I feel that I am correctly interpreting the wishes of the Board in congratulating you and Dr. Zaareb on your, eh, technical achievement.'

'Thank you.'

'There remains this matter of the tour to, eh, foreign places abroad, forgive me, to places abroad. Mr. Kosoff has written from Paris, where he is waiting for you.'

'I'm sorry I can't go . . . for another three weeks.'

Major T. Haw-Stag and Sir Willin Clutch, Kosoff's allies, angrily demanded an explanation.

'I am sorry, gentlemen, there are personal reasons, I must ask your indulgence . . .'

'Unwarrantable neglect of the Company's business.'

Pry looked very nervous and upset, the Directors were angry or annoyed that he should dare to cross their whim. It was the Chairman, again, who told them to lay off: 'I feel that if Mr. Pry says he can't go, he has some good reason for saying so, and I should be the last to put pressure on him to give an explanation if he does not wish to do so. Perhaps, Mr. Pry, you will write to me personally, as soon as you are able to join Mr. Kosoff. Now, gentlemen, there is this matter of the Bingham mortgage . . .'

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'Thank you, sir.' The 'sir' slipped out involuntarily, it was the first time Pry had ever used it in speaking to anyone on the Board.

After the Meeting Mr. Leary touched Pry on the arm, he was going somewhere with Mr. Cloacher, and he offered Pry a lift in the taxi as far as Liverpool Street. Mr. Leary not infrequently offered Pry a lift, it gave an opportunity for a few words after the Meeting, informal but sometimes quite important. On this occasion Pry froze up completely; with Mr. Cloacher present there could be no exchange of confidences, it would have been an indecency.

'Too bad you couldn't go to Paris, rather a set-back to the business, and you deserve a bit of skirt after working so hard.'

Mr. Cloacher did not hesitate to blunder on forbidden ground.

'Of course,' said Mr. Leary, brushing aside and half apologizing for Mr. Cloacher, 'I know what it is, ought to have thought of it during the Meeting, you're expecting a little arrival, isn't that it?'

'You may discuss that with Mr. Cloacher,' said Pry in a burst of fury; 'and put me down here.'

'Silly squit,' Pry heard Cloacher say, as the taxi drove off, and from that point onwards Pry's aversion from Mr. Cloacher held within it something of the blood feud.

The code message over the telephone, for which Pry was waiting, was 'Lord Fudley's private secretary speaking'. This would mean 'the things described on

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page 207 of the *Mothercraft Manual* have happened, am going to the Nursing Home, God help me, Mary'. The code message was Miss Rosewood's idea, and it was very necessary, for things were getting steadily worse in the general office.

It now contained a number of people of Mr. Cloacher's importation: an insolent and unpleasant young man called Wilkins, who combined the functions of clerk, commercial traveller and rate fixer for garden ornaments, on whom Mr. Cloacher unloaded most of his work, in the expectation that it would be done sometime; an impassive accountant called Rouse, to whom Mr. Cloacher gave orders, but who worked under the direction of General Thump at Head Office, and looked after the money; two dazed-looking anaemic girls, whose principal amusement was being rude to people when they answered the telephone; Miss Rosewood, who kept to herself and did Pry's typing and filing; and finally, Mrs. Block.

Mrs. Block, whose 'Welfare' duties were illusory, spent at least a third of her time in the general office, and with the three factions already there: Cloacher's, Pry's and General Thump's, constantly set about the ears, nagged and scandalized by Mrs. Block, the place became the scene of constant guerrilla warfare. Mr. Cloacher had of course told Mrs. Block about the incident in the taxi — that Mr. Pry had pupped a bastard, was the charming way he expresscd it — and Mrs. Block had spread the news with all kinds of unsavoury embellishments to anyone who would listen to her.

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The entry in the Company's minute book which defined the functions of Mr. Pry and Mr. Cloacher stated that the effect of its provisions was to make the position of both gentlemen so secure, that neither had anything to fear from the other; that whatever re-organization might be necessary in the interests of the Company as a whole, the sovereign rights of both parties were to remain inviolate, the Board being in the position of guarantor. This arrangement, which reflected the Chairman's and Mr. Leary's sense of justice, and the former's high diplomatic outlook, born of listening to other people's speeches at Westminster, was all right, except that it did not define any frontiers. One effect of it was that Mr. Cloacher did not take a summer holiday, for that would leave Pry in possession of the fort, and another effect was that Pry made the most elaborate arrangements for the period when he would be away on the Continent. These concerned, first, communications; second, withdrawal of the technical staff into the impregnable laboratory to work on by-products and starch condensation; third, stoppage of 'SUNSAP' manufacture and arrangements for certain improvements of a mechanical nature only to be made on the plant during his absence. On the first intimation of any attempted coup, Pry would return by air, and, as a precautionary measure, he told Kosoff so, in strict confidence, thus ensuring that Cloacher and everybody on the Board knew about it. Meanwhile the barrels of 'SUNSAP', made on the new plant, began to accumulate, there were already some fifteen tons of stock. There was no longer any question that the

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syrup could not be synthesized on a commercial scale; and thanks to the innate simplicity of the process, the development from experimental to commercial working had been made in one leap, with a remarkable absence of the incidental snags, which usually crop up during such developments. The only thing that was really complicated was Zaareb's blue catalyst, and the stocks of that were guarded like gold dust, in a heavy iron cubicle with a formidable lock.

On September 27th, three weeks late by the calendar, Pry returned to Snoot House in the evening to find Mary sitting like an emigrant in the hall, with suitcases of baby clothing around her. The taxi was on its way. 'I know I am going to die,' said Mary. She looked very attractive with her hair tousled about her face, and the frightened animal look in her eyes. 'You think so too, or you wouldn't start being so kind and helpful.'

Pry went with her to the nursing home, waited downstairs in the nurses' sitting-room, with a stale copy of *The Tatler*, until they had 'made her comfortable', and then went up. She was reclining heavily in her dressing-gown in a chair by the gas fire, and every now and then she groaned. Pry, with the kindly intention of taking her mind off things, sat and talked about 'SUNSAF' to her the whole evening. 'Do go away now and get your dinner,' she said. But to go without his dinner and get faint, Pry felt, was the least that he could do. He stayed until eleven and then went home, made himself an omelet, drank some cold milk and went to bed, where he slept soundly, albeit with one

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ear open for the telephone. At half-past six he was again at the nursing home: nothing had happened and he called again at eight. Mary was very white, her hair had gone limp, she had had no sleep but had been in agony most of the night, the pains were much worse. Pry hurried off to the works; but returned at lunch-time to find Mary very slowly, very cautiously moving about the room, gripping the edges of the furniture. They had told her it might help. Pry went back to the works: no one had been given a chance to guess what was happening; it was a normal quiet day.

That evening Mary was in bed, exhausted by the pain; Pry sat beside her holding her hands. At eleven he went downstairs and continued to wait, but at midnight they told him to go home. That night he did not go to bed, but prowled about making himself innumerable cups of tea. In the morning Mary was in a drugged sleep, she had to have rest. Pry threw cold water over his face, and prompt at nine was in his office at the works. There was a letter from the Chairman, asking him to go at once on that day to Dimchester, to see a man from Australia whom Graball and Co. claimed to have interested in some scheme for making 'SUNSAP' in the Antipodes; but fortunately, that morning No. 2 evaporator blew up; the damage was not serious, but it was sufficient pretext for postponing the journey. At lunch time Mary was awake, her face drawn with awful spasms of pain, not caring where she was or whether she lived or died. In the afternoon all was quiet at the works again, until a quarter to six, when Mr. Leary telephoned to

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say he wanted Pry to spend the evening with him going into costs. Miss Rosewood had just reached out for the telephone and taken the message, and, without so much as a look at Pry, she told Mr. Leary she was very sorry but Mr. Pry had just gone home. The day was through, and still no one the wiser.

That evening they refused to let him see Mary, the pains were much 'stronger' now — as though anything could be much worse than she had been through already — and he would understand that she did not wish to see anybody. Obstinate and immovable, Pry went into the sitting-room and began to wait. The evening wore through with a slowness that negatived all measure of time. Still Pry sat motionless in his chair. On the sideboard there was a melon. It so often caught his eyes as he glanced about the room, that it became a point of focus, a yellow globe about which the room hung suspended like an illusion. It became rotund, as it were with feeling, this melon, and the silver jugs and basins beside it, they too seemed full and alive, as though they would burst with a silver pain. Everything seemed to have taken on a vast and yet comprehended completeness, there was a physical pain over his heart. He saw Mary as he had seen her at the beginning of her labour, her eyes blue, a nobility in her head, thrown back as she bit her lips with pain. The dressing-gown with the orange flowers on it, drawn in beneath her load. He permitted himself the indulgence of grief, as though she were doomed to die, to play with the idea of death, like a lonely boy, although he knew, firm and good as a kitchen table, that she would

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not die, that soon too the babe would be born. And even at this time the thoughts of 'SUNSAP', that also welled up and became almost objective before him, seemed not unworthy; the wretched trade name slipped away, the ridiculous squabbling Board of Directors followed it, Cloacher was nothing, the plant, the chemical formulae were nothing, there remained one silvery and beautiful emergent hope: the winning of food from the air.

At two o'clock the doctors came, and there were low terrible moans. At four there was a bustle amongst the nurses, a cry, and a rattling of basins and pails. The babe was born.

They told him it was a boy, and Mary was exhausted but safe, and sleeping quietly.

A boy! Then he should be called Michael, because of Ireland and the hills of Moyne.

Two days later, Pry informed the Chairman he was ready to start for France, and Brigadier-General Sunderland Thump handed him three hundred pounds, in Bank of England notes, travelling expenses for Kosoff and himself. Before he left he received a picture postcard from Dr. Zaareb in the Tyrol:

Congratulations. As you say, medical science cannot spare women much at childbirth. There is hyoscine, but it's risky. I don't suppose you've seen a real Slav woman — they have no bother. The weather is brilliant here, but I am returning to London on Saturday, so the work will get along quite well without you. The tour with Kosoff to France, etc., is a com-

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plete waste of time, but no doubt the Board feel they are doing something. Hope you enjoy it. K. Z.

Pry, travelling first class on the s.s. *Versailles*, in a new suit and with three hundred pounds in his pocket, felt once again that life was good. He was somewhere between Newhaven and Dieppe. The excitements and the anxieties in England, from which he had emerged tired and confused but not a little jubilant, could remain in England. The excitements, apprehensions and further nervous crises which were in store for him in France could wait till he got there. Now, for an hour or so there was the sea. The ginger-beer-bottle-green sea, its surface taut-drawn, quick and a little angry. The breeze blowing about the boat deck in a cool abandoned way. The foam churning off the side of the boat, joining the wild turbulence of water at the stern, flattening out into the lovely turquoise wake over which hung the buoyant gulls. Such joyous dissipation of wasted power: the Grande Compagnie de Navigation Newhaven-Dieppe — it was sure to call itself something like that — emulsifying the ocean for sheer *joie de vivre*. Fine drops of the spray, cracking the sunlight into colour, played over the deck. Pry, turning his chair towards the breeze, the spray and the sun, sat with his eyes closed, the finger tips of each hand, lightly, very lightly, touching those of the other.

## CHAPTER XVIII

## INVISIBLE EXPORTS

PRY re-emerged into this world of trouble as soon as he arrived at St. Lazare. It was necessary to telephone Kosoff, to say he had arrived. Pichat 5405 looked simple enough, but putting it across a high-speed Parisian telephone operatrix was another matter. The sankoncatrer! zerosank! part of it scarcely occurred to him. After three attempts he left the cubicle, wiped the sweat from his forehead, and with awful feelings of inferiority and defeat, considered giving it up. He could after all find Kosoff by taking a taxi. He walked about in an agony of indecision for ten minutes, plunged again into a telephone cubicle, and at last got through. Kosoff answered excitedly in Uranian, but when Pry could get a word in, quietened down considerably, and changed over to his variety of English. He would meet Pry, at the *Café de Beau Monde*, in the Champs Elysées, in twenty minutes.

Grabbing his bags, one of which contained fourteen pounds of 'SUNSAP' in ornamental sample bottles, Pry hurried out of the station, yapped 'Hôtel Magnifique' to a taxi driver, and collapsed somewhat breathless on the back seat, where he was promptly flung from side to side, as the taxi began its temperamental manœuvrings in and out of the traffic. The hurry was quite unnecessary, but something in the atmosphere of Paris

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or the proximity of Mr. Kosoff started things moving at about one and a half times life speed.

Pry was terrified in advance of the Hôtel Magnifique, but he saw that however much he disliked it, he had got to rack himself up into a scale of living appropriate to Mr. Kosoff, he had to have an impressive address in Paris. Cook's Advisory Service had recommended the Magnifique, it was not the most expensive hotel, but it was not very far short of it.

At the Magnifique a resplendent commissionaire and two page boys closed in on him, others darted from behind gilded columns and bore off his luggage. He was escorted like a foreign dignitary round a rococo palm court to the reception office. He got his key, broke loose from the retinue, and hurried back to the taxi. It got into an oblique mix-up of tooting cars by the Louvre, was dispersed in a matter of four or five hundred words by an infuriated gendarme, dashed up the Champs Élysées and deposited Pry at the Café de Beau Monde.

It was not the sort of café where you sit at an iron table with three legs and get your drink served on a saucer with the price printed on it. With a horrible apprehension that he might not have caught the name correctly over the telephone, Pry pushed open an elegant door and entered the tea lounge. Half the *élite* of Paris must have been taking tea there; it was a place where fashion comes to life. A silk-sleeved Hungarian band was playing. In a little while Pry spotted Kosoff, in an alcove by some palms, in *tête-à-tête* with a lady: a lovely *delicatessen* piece, in squiffs of

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silk and silver fur. She wore a veil with little crystal pendants that dangled. This was a new complication.

‘Did Monsieur seek somebody?’

‘You see that gentleman, in the aluminium coloured suit, with the eyeglass, talking to the lady in the veil, *à la mode* Turkish? You do? Good. Tell him that a Monsieur Pry desires to speak with him. I’ll wait here.’ He pressed a five-franc note into a hand whose reflex movements seemed to invite it, and watched developments.

‘Would Monsieur please come this way?’

Pry, who felt like a bricklayer’s finger in a box of butterflies, approached Kosoff’s table. Kosoff sallied forth, shook him by the hand, patted him on the shoulder. The lady in the veil watched the encounter with an oblique glance, and tapped the ash of her cigarette pensively on a jade ash-holder.

‘Mademoiselle Cobra, I have much pleasure to present Mr. Pry. He is scientist, marvellous scientist . . . one of my Companies. We make together big business . . .’

‘Charmed, it shall be true, I am sure . . .’

‘Good afternoon,’ said Pry. Some men took such women out to tea; some men ate caviare; it all belonged to a world, a higher atmosphere of delicious fluff and flurry, into which he had no wings to ascend. Kosoff ordered the drinks.

‘We have here marvellous music, you have seen *so* before?’

*So* was a tall hypnotist in black tights, who had come down through the Hungarians, and was manipulating

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the air over a mysterious box, with long white hands. An electrical affair, the position of the performer's hands altering its electrostatic capacity and hence the notes.

Pry began a long explanation of how it worked, he had got as far as the second grid bias, when Kosoff cut in:

'In works you speak so; here only is music, and ladies most charming. But also this music is no good: wai-wah-wang, *timbre* is not.' He made curves in the air with his hands representing some desirable fullness of *timbre*. 'At once shall be real music, Hungarish music . . .' He clicked his fingers impatiently and a waiter sidled up. The waiter went to the conductor of the orchestra who leant forward and then nodded to Mr. Kosoff. The Hungarians broke into Liszt, like hell let loose.

Trying to take part in light but polyglot tea-table talk with Kosoff and Mademoiselle Cobra was too much for Pry, he became more and more awkwardly silent, and was heartily relieved when she rose, adjusted the hang of her handbag and miscellaneous trimmings, and left them.

'She is, how you call, in law my sister,' explained Kosoff, 'so charming and intelligent! Now is there one matter we must together at once speak.'

'Yes?' said Pry.

'From General Thump, he has given to you the banknotes; you have now brought with you the money?'

'Oh, yes, that's all right.'

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'Then you will please give to me, I will everything arrange.'

Pry took the safety-pin out of his breast pocket, and by a feat of conjuring, shuffled out twenty-two ten-pound notes, without exposing them to sight, and conveyed them to Kosoff under the table. Kosoff counted them likewise under cover.

'Here is only two hundred and twenty.'

'That's right,' said Pry. 'The other eighty I'm keeping, 'case I have to go back suddenly by air, hope you don't mind.' He looked at Kosoff very straight in the eyes. The lemur-like look on that gentleman's face changed quickly, the gloss returned.

'Of all things you think, so quick. I like you for you think *so*. Of course that is most correct, we speak of it no more.'

Pry replaced the safety pin.

Pry took very little notice of the gilded glamour of the Hôtel Magnifique when he returned there at midnight. He could scarcely keep his eyes open and Kosoff's voice still dinned in his ears. Twice, over dinner, he had told Kosoff everything they had to say to the Société Commerciale Boulevard & Carrosse, and Kosoff had talked excitedly, urgently, his idiom drawn from a muddle of tongues and all at cross purposes. Insistently, Pry had tried to bring him back to realities, until at last it did seem that he knew something of what it was all about. Then they had gone out of the restaurant, strolling along the illuminated streets to Kosoff's flat, Kosoff never ceasing to talk for one

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moment, and in his flat, over more brandy and cigarettes, Kosoff had said: 'Now for to-morrow we must prepare, we must have policy, you must tell me to say all you want . . .'

Pry sank limply on the bed. There was no air, everything in Paris was insufferably warm and cloying — and the smell . . . All Paris smelled of the insides of turkeys, mild or rich, the odour was everywhere, ubiquitous as the warmth from the central heating systems. He got up and tried to open the windows, but they were not made to open. He screwed down the valves on the radiators. He discovered he had a private bathroom. Bath? or sleep? he debated . . . for exclusive agency there must be *quid pro quo* . . . later, not yet, the licences to manufacture . . . when drawing turkeys the windows should be opened. He got into the bath and gradually lowered the temperature until the coldness had some bite in it. He walked about on the plush carpet, drying himself without towels in the heated air, looking at his body in the mirrors by the soft pink lights.

The telephone bell rang. It was Kosoff. 'Already you are in bed, not yet is it one o'clock, I think about to-morrow . . . with the orders we must not pay the duties, in France are great duties, I mean by Brussels must the goods be sent. You will come, if you please, at once here.'

Patiently Pry protested that if he talked any more that night he would be too tired for the conference in the morning, he would come to breakfast, that would not be very long now.

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At half-past eight, over coffee and rolls, they talked about the duties, went over it all again, but the conference with Boulevard & Carrosse was not until eleven-thirty. They would go to the manicurists. Kosoff, complete in silver-grey hat, yet another suit, and gloves of unborn kid skin, promenaded the Champs Élysées as though he had recently bought it and Pry lurched along beside him. 'You will like also to have hair cut?' said Kosoff, surveying Pry's appearance without much satisfaction. Pry refused. He always wore it like that, but he would accompany Mr. Kosoff in the manicure. When it was finished the tips of his fingers were the only parts of him that were really *comme il faut* by Kosoff standards.

The Siège Sociale of the Société Commerciale Boulevard & Carrosse was in the Boulevard Machiavel. It resembled an embassy. Its lofty chambers were closed by double sound-proof doors, and the landing, on which one waited, had the air of an ante-room to Court intrigue and secretive manipulations of vast wealth. Monsieur Sarrebouche introduced himself with elaborate but hard and lubricated politeness to Monsieur Kosoff. Pry got a curt nod and was allowed to follow. The difference between an entity and a nonentity is one of personality potential and Monsieur Sarrebouche was of good family and a member of the Chamber of Deputies. M. Sarrebouche was enraptured to make the acquaintance of M. Kosoff, and M. Kosoff was none the less enchanted. M. Carrosse, President of their Company, had prayed that M. Kosoff and his attaché would honour him at lunch at the Hôtel

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Écluse; and M. Kosoff was full of the most distinguished sentiments for M. Carrosse, whom he had had the phenomenal happiness to meet before, in connection with another business. But yes, the other business was marvellous, for it the political circumstances were most propitious — a speciality, manufactured in Germany for the Defence against Gas, an agency exclusive, with Mr. Mayfair Smith. Marvellous business!

Pry, who understood a great deal more of this torrent of French than Kosoff suspected, sat wondering when this high encounter would be punctured by some reference to 'SUNSAP'.

But now M. Kosoff had come on a mission for another of his Companies, a great English Company — on the Board the Marquis of Dillwater, Lord Lambsbottam, Major T. Haw-Stag, and Sir Willin Clutch (Bart.), he had from them a little business: the Synthetics. Ah, yes, said M. Sarrebouche, most interesting the synthetics. There also was great business? M. Sarrebouche shrugged his shoulders. Count Klamac? Count Klamac was so-so, no more should he anything discuss, the Board. . . .

'He has no longer any authority from the Board to discuss the Company's business with you,' said Pry bluntly in English.

M. Sarrebouche understood English very well.

'There is not more the associations . . .'

But M. Sarrebouche comprehended perfectly, the honoured gentlemen on M. Kosoff's Board had without doubt good reason. Count Klamac was a monsieur most puissant, he had made representations the most

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express, but would M. Kosoff convey to MM. the Board with distinguished compliments that Messrs. Boulevard & Carrosse would in the future entertain with M. le Count only the collateral exchanges.

Mr. Kosoff seemed to find this satisfactory, so Pry let it pass. He addressed Mr. Sarrebouche: 'I sent you samples of the new syrup in the spring, and one of the objects of our visit is to ascertain what progress you have made with them in preparation for a serious selling campaign next year.'

M. Sarrebouche smiled ironically. This sudden ram butting was a little gauche in the offices of the Société Boulevard & Carrosse. He turned to Kosoff:

'By our protocol of January 13th, we informed your Board of the unfortunate results of the experiments with the original Cocaine synthetics, we made no claim for the consequent injury to our prestige and reputation, and when we were informed of your change of staff, and of Dr. Zaareb's new synthetics, we agreed, provisionally, to keep the agency in being, but we proceeded with circumspection, a little *lentement* . . .'

'Naturally,' said Kosoff, conciliatory. 'If you please, of course.'

'You have retained for yourselves the exclusive agency for France, Belgium, Switzerland and Spain, and our Board desire to know what you have done. They have asked me to obtain from you a list of persons to whom you have submitted the samples of "SUNSAP".'

M. Sarrebouche did not answer Pry but addressed M. Kosoff with icily restrained annoyance: 'We are not accustomed to be asked for lists — or to have the

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good faith of our Société examined — it would create an intolerable situation.'

Kosoff explained hurriedly in French that Pry had not meant what he said, that what he really meant was that information about tests on the Continent would be most valuable to him, for comparison with information from other sources; that the Board, who had never doubted the good faith of Boulevard & Carrosse, had felt confident that they would give Mr. Pry this technical assistance. Mr. Pry was a marvellous technician, but . . . M. Sarrebouche would understand.

M. Sarrebouche was somewhat mollified. But Pry wondered how their next demand could be put over, which was that a member of their organization should accompany him, Mr. Pry, on a tour round France to check up the list.

At that moment one of the telephones on the desk began to buzz discreetly, and while M. Sarrebouche was occupied with it, Pry looked at Kosoff and raised his eyebrows by a scarcely perceptible shade. Kosoff replied by a glare, and an equally imperceptible shake of the head. Pry's idea of doing business was to say what had to be said straight out, settle what was to be done, and go. This tentative, diplomatic, kid-glove approach, with everything wrapped up in swansdown, exasperated him.

M. Sarrebouche, replacing the receiver, explained that certainly their Company had, in the fullest measure, carried out their obligations under Clause 7 of the Contract, preliminary propaganda and research, that he would get an employee to prepare the list

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desired by the Board, but that he must, for his part, demand from Mr. Pry the fullest and most explicit information concerning experimental results in other countries, the cost of the product, the forms of packing to be adopted, and the supplies available.

Pry smiled; he was not to be caught out with a demand for that sort of information: he reached for his dispatch case, which was lying under his chair, and produced a sheaf of impressive memoranda, already translated into French by Flowerdews. M. Sarrebouche had only to read them. It could not be denied that they gave the required information, but that did not put M. Sarrebouche in any better temper. Completely ignoring this Mr. Pry, he talked for half an hour in rapid French about other matters with Kosoff.

‘Have I *got* to come?’ asked Pry, in the taxi on the way to the Hotel Écluse. ‘Of course,’ said Kosoff. ‘Impossible you should not.’ ‘I’d much rather,’ said Pry, ‘go and get seven francs’ worth in the “Boul Mich”.’ ‘Impossible’ said Kosoff. ‘At the Écluse the lunch will cost five hundred francs, you do not know how much to a Frenchman is five hundred francs; it is more than is to an Englishman five hundred pounds. It is the greatest honour, impossible you should refuse.’

The oysters were the first nuisance; Pry had never before eaten oysters; and was not a little anxious about the way to detach the integuments politely from their shells. It was a relief to find them already detached; the worst rarely happens. Conveying them to his mouth on the broad pronged silver implement

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provided was not difficult. To swallow raw cold globs of marine gristle, smelling briskly of the fish market, was not pleasant, but that did not matter, the main thing was to wear a suitable facial expression whilst swallowing them. Complacency with a shade of the gourmet's satisfaction in fine eating was what he intended. M. Carrosse smiled encouragingly: 'In England you have fine oysters — from Weetstable,' he suggested.

'But these are delicious,' said Pry. 'To consume them is an experience.'

'Ah, yes,' said M. Carrosse.

The lunch, all things considered, was not so bad. M. Carrosse, who was the Chairman of the Company, was a very different kettle of fish from M. Sarrebouche. He was easy and direct. He had had nothing to do personally with the synthetics business; but he would now examine it. He quite agreed that Mr. Pry, who presumably knew all about the new synthetics, ought to visit the people in France who were supposed to be working with them; he would instruct M. Sarrebouche to arrange it. It seemed to him a good proposition for them to go in for 'SUNSAP', as the margin of profit on the other feeding stuffs which they sold was very small. Under the influence of the Heidsieck and the grateful flavours of the Châteaubriant he became even more amiable, and said he would make M. Sarrebouche prepare immediately material for the Réclame. M. Sarrebouche glared murderously at Pry.

Let off, that afternoon, and free of Kosoff, Pry lingered in the Tuileries Gardens, digesting the lunch and eyeing the statuary. The progress with M. Carrosse

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seemed too good to be true; it was as though all resistance had suddenly dropped away, and there was nothing to lean against. Perhaps, after all, some 'SUNSAP' would be sold in France, and the Board were right and he was wrong. He strolled about in the speckled sunshine under the trees, wondering where was the snag.

That evening he again talked with Kosoff until midnight.

'All at once,' said Kosoff, 'it cannot be done. You see how at lunch there was progress, it is now less difficult, to-morrow we must in return give lunch to them, at your hotel you will arrange. M. Carrosse says to-day it is all-you-want, to-morrow he will perhaps forget, or turn face to back. It is necessary to make strong impression. You do not understand, to make some business is like beautiful song; once — it is heard and there remains nothing, twice, *dreimal*, four times — then only, begins to be remembered the song. Before it *is not*.'

But in the meantime Pry had thought of the snag: with all this high ceremonial and diplomacy in the 'establishment of relations', both he and Kosoff had forgotten what they came for. It remained to get out of Boulevard & Carrosse a definite order for so much 'SUNSAP'.

'Are you going to ask them for their first order to-morrow, or shall I?'

'Ah, no, no, no. To-morrow in morning we speak technicals; then shall come good lunch; then in afternoon I shall take with me Sarrebouche, where is to be had something, a commission perhaps, from other business. Then you will write and everything tell to the

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Board. Then together we go to Rome. And the Chairman will from London write a letter. From the Chairman a letter. Then we come back from Rome and you go with Sarrebouche, into the Départements, and all the time you talk to him. Then we speak again in Paris a little with them, then together we go to Berlin, and when we return once more to Paris, everything is, how you say . . . ?'

'Ripe?' suggested Pry.

'It is ripe, *mis-à-point*, then becomes at once the order, you like it so?'

Pry groaned.

'You go to restaurant. There is there a beautiful woman. At once you want. But you must first take her to dance, buy nice things, sometimes must you much speak, is it not so?'

'That,' thought Pry, 'would depend . . . '

Very, very gently, on the following day, the matter of an order was raised with Boulevard & Carrosse, not openly, only as something that might happen in the future, and that, in the delicate springtime of their present complimentary exchanges, was of course even a little indelicate to talk about. With equal refinement M. Carrosse reflected that, without doubt, MM. the Hydro-Mechanical Company would send the first stocks on consignment, that is to say send the stuff to France at their own risk and expense, and be content to receive payment if and when Messrs. Boulevard & Carrosse managed to sell any. 'Later,' said Mr. Kosoff, 'we speak of that.'

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The report on these conferences in Paris, which Pry sent to the Board, filled twelve pages of typescript. It could quite well have been left in Pry's perfectly legible handwriting; but just to convince himself that he wasn't afraid of her, and to play the game as he imagined it ought to be played, he hired a stenographer at the Hôtel Magnifique.

Having 'restored confidence' and 'reopened negotiations' in Paris, Pry and Kosoff left for Rome. First class on the Rome Express. A smell of varnish and cheap scent seemed to ooze from the panelling and dove-grey upholstery of the *wagon-lit*. It was very hot, and Kosoff said impossible they should open the window. Every time an attendant came through the train Kosoff bought two fancy packets of Turkish cigarettes, one for himself one for Pry. The train raced south, and at last Kosoff's insistent spring of talk dried up; over and over again they had discussed what had happened in Paris, reviewed the new dossier for Signor Bombolo in Rome, and Kosoff, sentimental about children, had spoken about Pry's baby at home, what *is* a father and what *is* a babe, that for Pry now would come big fortune, for the babe nice home and all-you-want. But at last the talk dried up; Pry was long since tired of it and at last Kosoff succumbed. He put on the rubber fringe net, which imparted the requisite soupçon of a wave to his sleek black hair and served to flatten the lie of his ears; clad himself in pyjamas of Chinese silk and turned in. Pry had the upper berth and lay suffocating in hot, sour vapour, all night.

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THE bunks in the *wagon-lit* were folded back; the chilly, wasted air of early morning scoured through the train; Mr. Kosoff, washed and cosmeticated, was looking out of the window:

‘Come, look here, if you please, it is wonderful country, marvellous!'

They were in Italy, past Genoa, and had been running for some time near the sea, through tunnels with openings from which could be seen small boats with triangular sails, fishing perhaps for pilchards. Now they had come into the open, and the whole landscape looked dry and unsatisfying, as though all the body had been bleached from the colouring. There were pine trees, tall, upholding stagnant mops of flattened greenery against the impassive blue fixity of the sky. You could put a Botticelli Venus there, or an idealized Cupid parachuting from a porcelain balloon. . . .

‘Pretty . . . ah, look, how pretty . . . the marvellous colours!’ Kosoff felt pleased and diffusively kind, but for once Pry did not acquiesce; he had had an awful night and was feeling peevish:

‘It looks calcified,’ he said.

A shade of quick resentment passed across Kosoff’s face, as though Pry’s independence were a personal affront. It was time to go for breakfast. . . .

Fascist soldiers boarded the train, big, in jaundiced

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khaki, with large hats, and a week's growth of stubble. They had revolvers handy in their holsters and peered into every compartment. Mr. Kosoff was uneasy.

On, past Pisa and Leghorn, it was really autumn and that perpendicular sun a cheat and a fraud. The leaves were thinning on the deciduous trees and drying up without change of colour, just drying up yellow. The untidy vines all finished, much of the land already ploughed up for the winter, the hay and straw in, piled in high stooks round spars, which stuck out from the top like the wicks of candles. They arrived in Rome.

Kosoff had reserved a suite at the Hôtel Amazzone. To go there, from London, was not to travel twelve hundred miles across Europe, but to translate oneself fifty years backward in time. The magnificence of the Amazzone was that of Queen Victoria's reign, but not dead and preserved — the living thing. Great dining and reception rooms, with chandeliers, lustres and palms. Grey flunkeys in gaiters and periwigs. The conferences began again.

Signor Bombolo, Madame Bombolo and their seven sons, lived in the Via Scarlati, in a mansion for all the world like those in the quadrant at Regent's Park. Bombolo had inherited one fortune with his name, and made another as a merchant dealing in the import of wheat. The name Flavius Bombolo was not to be trifled with; for it was known that he was a cousin by marriage of Prince Anonimo, who stood at the right hand of He-who-must-not-be-named. That was how Count Klamac got hold of him, in the beginning.

Kosoff and Pry were conducted by a footman through

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a saloon full of oil paintings, into the room which Bombolo used as his office. It was small, stuffed with mahogany furniture, and actually had things in wax under glass covers. Signor Bombolo bowed to M. Kosoff; Julius Bombolo, who was an Advocate, bowed to Mr. Pry; everybody bowed to each other; and at a signal from Signor Bombolo took their seats at a round table, on which a footman laid writing and blotting paper. Before Signor Bombolo lay the Contract, on parchment with hangings of green silk and red seals. It was ascertained that M. Kosoff spoke French, German, English, Uranian and Yiddish; Signor Bombolo spoke French and Italian; Julius Bombolo spoke Italian and could understand English, and Mr. Pry could speak English and understand French and German. It was decided that the conference should be conducted in the French language. In view of the lamentable results of the *lancement* of the synthetics manufactured by Cocaine, it would be necessary first to have an express and categorical assurance that 'SUNSAP' was now what it purported to be.

No preliminary compliments and beating around the bush, but straight into the job in hand. Pry with a great sense of relief, produced a copy of a letter in which these assurances had already been given.

Yes, Signor Bombolo had cognizance of that, and the new samples of 'SUNSAP' had been analysed in Rome, they had been found to contain nothing obviously poisonous, and to have sixty per cent of sugars as stated: but could this new material be manufactured in bulk, if so in what quantity, and was the commercial

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article actually manufactured on the productive plant the same as that produced in the laboratory?"

Signor Bombolo certainly had a grip on the business. Pry produced photographs of the new plant, stated its capacity, and placed on the table samples of the 'SUNSAP' made by it, with certified analyses.

Good. Accepting these assurances, Signor Bombolo would proceed. Julius Bombolo would produce the first Réclame, issued by Società Sintetico Bombolo, based on the discoveries of the Sapristo Institute. The pamphlet, very beautifully printed on sheets of translucent paper, showed two photographs. One of a naked child about five, whose body was emaciated and whose limbs were twisted, with an eruption on its face; the other of another child of the same age and sex, with straight plump limbs, a clear complexion and a most attractive smile. The implication was that the last had been nourished on 'SUNSAP', whilst the first had not. The pamphlet announced to the world that the Società Sintetico Bombolo had the honour to present SCIROPPO SINTETICO 'SUNSAP', the last product of scientific research in child nutrition.

Pry regarded the pamphlet with fascination not unalloyed with horror. It was a dangerous, flamboyant lie, for no matter what had happened at Sapristo, or what the properties of 'SUNSAP', such an effect in the nutrition of children could not have been established in six short months. The pamphlets were wet from the printers, which meant that they had been printed for the conference: an answer to the suggestions in letters which Pry had written that the Società Bombolo was

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holding the agency and doing nothing about it. The text beneath the photographs was translated into English by Julius Bombolo; all it said was that 'SUN-SAP' had been given to two out of four selected children at an Institution for three months; it had not proved unwholesome and the two children who had received it in addition to other food had gained in weight, whilst of those who had not had it, one had lost weight and its rickety condition had not improved. The two photographs had no reference to the text, and if the reader thought they had, so much the worse for him, for it did not say so.

Signor Bombolo, continuing, said that the English Company should be satisfied, from this document, that the Italian Company had, in the fullest measure, carried out their obligations under Clause 7, preliminary investigations and propaganda. He went on to demand from the manufacturers full guarantees of the fitness of the product for sale, information about prices, and quantities to be reserved against call for export to Italy, as he said Count Klamac had promised him. The session continued for two hours, and everything to be said about the business had been said. Signor Bombolo would exert his powerful influence with the Corporations, but the English Company need not imagine that they would make money out of his pocket. He would order no stocks in advance. They must ship the stuff to Italy at their cost, pay the import duty, and in turn receive payment from him, Signor — or as you please, Società Sintetico Bombolo, only after the goods had been sold to the Italian consumers. Even then he would

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require six months' credit, and his remuneration must be a flat thirty per cent of the selling price. That was the understanding reached with Count Klamac. Signor Bombolo saw no foundations for reflections upon the integrity of Count Klamac, he was known to be *en rapport* with certain high political entities, and he was financially interested in the Società Bombolo, having founders' shares. He, Signor Bombolo, was not prepared to break his relations with Count Klamac upon unfounded suspicion. After one year, if a demand were then created for 'SUNSAP' in Italian territory, Signor Bombolo would be prepared to review the question of his buying 'SUNSAP', free on board at an English port, as an ordinary merchant; but even so, the English Company must be prepared, on certain not very favourable conditions, to grant licences for the manufacture of 'SUNSAP' in Italy, and reveal in full the manufacturing secrets to them, as Count Klamac had agreed. There was no more to say; but Signor Bombolo and his sons would be honoured if their distinguished visitors from England would permit them to extend the courtesies of Rome.

At lunch, back at the Amazzone, Kosoff was worried. 'It is not good, I think we can nothing do; bad people; they would everything take and nothing give; and always there is Klamac, Klamac, Klamac. . . .'

'Does he really exist, does anybody ever see him, what does he look like, this Klamac?'

'Ssssh,' said Kosoff, leaning across the table and dropping his voice. 'In England it is so nice, there can you take coffee and speak as you wish, there is not there

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an ear, here an ear, always the secret police, here we must not speak . . . the waiter perhaps . . .'

'But Mr. Kosoff, couldn't you really do something to puncture this Klamaphobia, ask him to dinner, for instance; surely it's only because you and the other Directors never *see* Klamac that you allow him to assume such proportions in your minds . . .'

Kosoff's face had suddenly gone dead white. 'Look!' he cried, 'THERE!'

Pry looked round; save for themselves the enormous dining-room was empty, for they were taking lunch very late: there was only the polished floor and the vacant tables.

'There, did you not see, there went Klamac!'

With a glance at Kosoff, Pry applied himself to the noodles in his soup. The colour came back slowly into Kosoff's face and his eyes lost their embarrassing fixity of regard. When he spoke next it was as though he had no knowledge of the incident, and Pry was careful never to refer to it.

'I like not this morning; such terms are no good; it is impossible we go yet; we must stay, two days, four days, a week perhaps, and make very big impression. I have seen you did not bring with you a dinner suit — but it makes nothing, I shall all arrange. . . .'

There would be no escaping it, the awful empty process of social massage, and on Bombolo it would never work. In Paris perhaps it might, but never on Bombolo in Rome. Mr. Kosoff might as well try it on the Elgin marbles.

'Do you know, Mr. Kosoff, what I should do?'

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‘If-you-please, what should you do?’

‘Cut out all this business of dinners and flunkeys and flowers. Bombolo is a wealthy man, established here with every luxury in Rome, we cannot impress him in that way. Put the real case before him: say, here are we, doing what has never been done before, making food from the atmosphere. You have the sole right of exploiting this tremendous discovery in Italy, do you expect to have that for nothing? We want your help, and we want it now; we ask you to help, not by putting out extravagant and precipitate propaganda, but by giving us a definite order for some of the stuff and paying for it. We must have the money and we must know that you are going to market the sugar here. We will not have an agency that merely blocks the Italian market.’

‘You are too young, you do not understand what is the world.’

‘If it is not an approach that you can make, is there any reason why I should not try? I can say that much in plain French.’

‘Please, you will speak as you wish, but first, you will at once write telegram, in so nice English, to Commander Scorpione on R. Nave *Pocastro*, at Naples. On Thursday, if he would be so kind, Mr. Kosoff accompanied Signor Bombolo would pay visit, it is necessary we shall have lunch, nice wine with the officers, and guard, how you say, of Honour. You will all write, on telegram you will please spend, twenty, fifty, a hundred lire, it does not matter, so big a warship, it will make great impression.’

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Pry looked at Kosoff, now fidgeting up and down the dining-room, with a certain wondering admiration, and set himself to the task of composing the telegram.

‘With Scorpione once had I very good business, you will please say Mr. Kosoff especially requests, he will everything arrange.’

In extending the courtesies of Rome to his English visitors, Signor Bombolo left little undone. Tertius Bombolo began by taking them in his father’s powerful car into Tuscany so that they should at one and the same time see Rome from the Tuscan Hills and visit the piggeries of Signor Napoli, an official of the local agricultural corporation. A mob of ragged, filthy and starving children followed the car as it nosed through the narrow streets of the village, and the gentlemen made their way into the house of S. Napoli through a thicket of outstretched and beseeching hands. S. Napoli gave them the burnt wine of the district, in a cool, dark room, and let them out at the back to look at the piggeries. Unlike the piggeries at Moyne, these sties were not constructed with any idea that the pig dislikes filth, darkness and abominable smells. Mr. Kosoff, stood someway back, and looked not at the pigs but at the walls of the houses, dried and brown and ochreous, rising high into the glare. Between the houses, from all floors from the first to the top, ropes were stretched, on which the inhabitants were drying ragged underclothing, petticoats and trousers. ‘It is horrible,’ said Kosoff, ‘so horrible. Here are experiments no good.’

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Then Bombolo himself, with another of his sons, student of political relations at the University, took them to the Ministry of Food, and to the Professor of Economic Nutrition. At both of which places he told the story of SCIROPPO SINTETICO 'SUNSAP', and the great work of Società Sintetico Bombolo and its associated English Company, now represented with maximal distinction by Messrs. Kosoff and Pry. But the really unsurpassable gesture was the lunch in the Via Scarlati; the footmen in white linen jackets, one to each chair; Madame Bombolo talking exquisitely in French about London policemen; and the dessert served on plates of solid gold. After lunch, the ceremony *familiare* in the library, for men only. The library, a long narrow room, with a mahogany table down the centre, so that one walked up one side and down the other, as in a museum, and at the end of the library a large painting of *Il Duce* — with laurels, a glass case with some letters of *Il Duce* in his own handwriting, and, like the Ark of the Covenant, a violin that *Il Duce* himself had once played. Very slowly, very reverently, Signor Bombolo led four of his sons, Kosoff and Pry, round the room, to stand in silent awe before the painting, and to hold each in turn the precious violin. 'Mussolini . . .' began Pry, who did not appreciate until afterwards the holiness of the occasion. But Kosoff trod firmly on his foot: *Il Duce*, He-who-must-not-be-named.

But still Kosoff did not receive a reply to his telegram to Commander Scorpione; it was becoming very serious. It would be most humiliating to come off the worst in this competition in paying compliments, and

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Bombolo had obviously the lead so far. Pry was as anxious as Kosoff that the telegram should come, not because he thought that lunch on a battleship would in any way affect the destiny of 'SUNSAP', but because Kosoff was so miserably disturbed. They had been sitting in the lounge of the Amazzone for an hour and a half, on the verge of hope and disappointment, when a flunkey came in with a telegram on a salver for Signor Pry. 'Quick!' said Kosoff. 'If you please you will at once open and read to me.'

Pry read: SULLIVAN REPORT MAGNIFICENT. EXPERIMENT SUCCESSFUL. FOURTEEN PIGS AVERAGE WEIGHT FORTY-FIVE POUNDS SIX WEEKS. THRIVING. OFFICIAL ACTION TAKEN. ZAAREB.

'Zck,' said Kosoff, 'it is technicals . . . if you please it does not matter, but Scorpione, why, why, why does he not wire . . . ?'

'Damn Scorpione,' said Pry, forgetting himself in his excitement. 'We've got O'Sullivan's report. This is not propaganda, don't you realize what this means . . . ?'

'Zck,' said Kosoff, 'again it is technicals. Scorpione, why does he not wire? But your telegram is good, you have some pleasure to read?'

'It is the best thing that has happened since we found the blue catalyst. 'SUNSAP' is established. It is a technical success. The news of this result will have reached every Department of Agriculture in Europe in a few weeks. Fourteen forty-five-pound pigs at six weeks!'

'Of course it is success, always you will have marvellous success, but Scorpione . . . '

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On the following morning Pry received a copy of O'Sullivan's report, in full, with a photograph of a fine white sow and fourteen pigs, with a terse note from Zaareb, which he had sent express by air mail, saying there was no need for any excitement. And Kosoff got his invitation from Commander Scorpione. All was once again right with his world. It remained to buy some flowers for the Countess Scorpione.

In the most expensive florists in Rome, with its heavy odour of water and blooms, Mr. Kosoff demanded of the frock-coated manager, something 'very nice'; roses with stems as long as lilies, chrysanthemums with the smell of violets. He quizzed impatiently at one lot of dahlias, sienna coloured, with voluminous heads of curly petals. Yes, he would send, but no, they were not sufficient; with roses they would be very nice? They go together, yes? Of course they didn't go together, a mixed lot of dahlias and roses. Nothing could be more incompatible, except perhaps fried plaice served *in* the soup. But off they went, by special messenger, flowers for the Countess.

Pry left Mr. Kosoff in a barber's and went off to explore Rome. He ate fettucini at Alberta's, the proprietor himself manipulating the yard long hanks of fresh made spaghetti and stirring in the butter and parmesan. Then he took a droshky to the Coliseum, near which He-who-must-not-be-named had set men breaking up ancient Roman remains with pickaxes to make way for modern buildings. It caused a lot of dust, but it seemed a good idea, and hoping from what he saw of the Coliseum that the movement would spread,

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he went on to St. Peter's, the Vatican, the Ludovici galleries and the Sistine Chapel. Mixed up with all the costive leaden stuff of Roman art, Pry found Michelangelo — overpainted with fig leaves — and the Venus de Cyrano.

But Pry was to see more of the museums, for when Kosoff went with Bombolo to be fêted on the battleship, Pry was left alone, and Sextus Bombolo, specialist in the Beaux Arts, was deputed to show him round. The statuary in the Vatican, with explanations, was to Pry even more boring than without, and although something like a guilty conscience kept saying to him: 'You are in Rome, look, be sensible of its marvels', the incorrigible Mr. Pry kept also saying to himself: 'I am sick of all this, and I want to go home; it has ceased to have anything to do with my job; and I wonder how Mary is getting on, with my ugly infant son.'

Kosoff returned from Naples in great feather; Bombolo had such wonderful time, they had even fired a small gun; it had made really big impression. Now he would do all-you-want and finish.

At a final conference, Signor Bombolo expressed himself ready to develop the business with the utmost influence and energy. He had consulted his co-directors and he would demand of Count Klamac his credentials before again shaking him by the hand. He was impressed in the greatest measure by the report from O'Sullivan and the results which had been obtained in the Irish Free State. He would ask Messieurs Kosoff and Pry to convey to their Board his determination to co-operate and his most distinguished senti-

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ments of goodwill. He did not see any prospect of substantial sales of 'SUNSAP' in Italy until the Agricultural and Medical Consorzi had more knowledge of the product and it could be manufactured out of the Italian atmosphere on Italian soil. He could buy nothing in advance, but in token of his confidence and great enthusiasm for the business he would ask the English Company to put at his disposal in Italy, at once, one ton of 'SUNSAP' in five-litre cans, on the terms of the original contract, that is to say, the English Company paying freight, import duties and storage charges.

The mountain had brought forth a mouse.

## CHAPTER XX

### OFFERINGS FOR KOUGELHOF

'At first comes a babe, he is so small as a shoe, but so quick he grows and is big man . . . you will all say . . . you will please remember.' Pry was concocting his report in the train. Mr. Kosoff also wrote a report; and Signor Bombolo wrote a report; so that the Board would have three reports altogether, which was only right, as reports were about all the Company would ever get for its money. With undiminished optimism, Kosoff said that in Paris was not such difficulty, they would there make very big business.

And, strangely enough, when they again called on Boulevard and Carrosse, there was a complete change in that Company's attitude. They exhibited the liveliest interest in every detail of the business; they had read Pry's memoranda about the properties and price of 'SUNSAP', and asked a great many further questions, noticeably about the synthetic process itself and the method of manufacture, which Pry answered evasively. They attached, they said, the very greatest importance to their agency, and to show how strenuously they were performing their part, produced two reports which they had obtained from remote agricultural syndicates, speaking very highly of 'SUNSAP' as a foodstuff for animals and proclaiming it a treacle of superlative quality and of the most profound interest to the community agricole.

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M. Sarrebouche had compiled a list of some seven or eight persons, who, he said, had performed experiments with 'SUNSAP' in France, and Mr. Pry must, as he had suggested, visit them all immediately. Most unfortunately, to visit them would necessitate travelling some eighteen hundred miles, in an irregular and extremely fatiguing circuit of France; and one of their travellers who had visited these people, after their experiences with Cocaine's old mixture, had been severely mauled and bitten by dogs which were released at him. But no matter, Mr. Pry was no doubt a brave man, and he must commence immediately. He, M. Sarrebouche, would accompany him as far as Seine Inferieure; after that...

M. Sarrebouche, whose large fleshy nose gave him something the appearance of Mr. Punch, smiled diabolically.

'Nasty piece of work, Sarrebouche,' remarked Pry to Kosoff, that evening.

'I also do not like, but I speak, I have spoke M. Carrosse, he telled to me Sarrebouche is not business man, they keep him because he has many high-class friends, he is, how you call, social tic tac. Now Sarrebouche is angry because he shall do as he is told. In synthetics M. Carrosse is now most interested, he will do all-you-want and finish.'

'Why this sudden change?'

'He told to me he had speaked Kougelhof. You do not know how great is Kougelhof — the cabal Kougelhof — in England is Co-ordinated Defence and Vital Industries Control Board, so calls itself "Coda". You

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know how everywhere where is pie, the Coda have, how you say, a foot in it. But Coda, he is only the fat boy; on Continent, everywhere on Continent, is Kougelhof. He is giant, everywhere is Kougelhof — of Kougelhof we must not speak. Of Brahma there is following story: a man would jump; one time he jump over a cat; then he jump over street; then he take big run and jump right over the sea; then he says himself, I will jump all way to the red columns of the sky. He make hell of a jump. But Brahma — he is God — he laughs, red columns of the sky is only the fingers of his hands. Impossible he jump out of the hand of Brahma. So is Kougelhof. The Bourse — Kougelhof; Agricole — Kougelhof; ships, factories, banks, munitions — all is in hand of Kougelhof. You see how come dictators, new governments, revolutions, much terrible speeches. In city is crisis. Then is war, across grenze and frontiers come the guns, people is killed, in air is poison, like flies die the children. Then laughs Kougelhof. For Kougelhof is no frontiers; everywhere is Kougelhof. Impossible we shall jump out of his hand. Wherever is money is Kougelhof.'

'And what says Kougelhof to "SUNSAP"?"

'He says M. Carrosse must immediately everything do; he must have fullest informations; it is good.'

'Why?'

'You do not like? With Kougelhof comes big money; he will perhaps all buy, all sugar, all treacles is with Kougelhof. To him at Bullock the little factory is nothing, he can all buy, and for the Board is no more troubles. There is good possibilities, because as I

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tell Carrosse, "SUNSAP" is new competition, when buys a man "SUNSAP", he buys not from Kougelhof. Therefore Kougelhof will buy "SUNSAP", and it comes not on the market, you understand?"

'And the Board would sell?'

'Natürlich, at once the Board would sell.'

So that explained Boulevard & Carrosse's change of front: they saw a chance of being intermediaries in a deal with the Kougelhof gang. Their own business in some way pawned to them, they would make a profit by getting the 'SUNSAP' process into their maw. Certainly the Board would sell, if they had the opportunity, and that would be the end of sugar from the air. It would share the fate of so many useful inventions which threaten the interests of the great combines. It would be bought up and no more would be heard of it. But there was no immediate cause for worry, the big combines never took a risk, they would make sure first that the new process was really a success. Kougelhof would not move yet.

Mr. Kosoff left for London to counter the unfortunate impression which would be made on the Board by Pry's reports, and Pry left Paris on his tour of France. From the Somme, Marne, Garonne, Creuse, Maine and the Languedoc he sent further reports, exposing the patent humbug of the pretence that Boulevard & Carrosse had really done anything and urging the Board to terminate the agreement with them. A few people had received samples about a month before and some had even fed it casually to their animals, but that was all. Pry collected a great deal of information about

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live stock in France, saw an immense amount of French rural scenery, met with great courtesy from the people he visited, drank a great many different kinds of wine, picked up a surprising amount of French under stress of necessity, and on the whole had quite a memorable holiday at the Company's expense. He returned to Paris to meet Mr. Kosoff, and to find a formidable bundle of letters waiting for him at his hotel.

The first letter was one dated a fortnight previously, from the Board, suggesting he should call off the French tour, as Mr. Kosoff thought it unnecessary. The next was from Mary, saying she was back again at Snoot House, with the baby, and that the silence with their friend Abner Muller had at last been broken, for he had sent a post card about Michael. Then there was a letter from Miss Rosewood: Mr. Cloacher had dismissed Plummox, because, he declared, the man had been insolent to him and had refused to clean his car. But Zaareb had quietly said that Plummox was to be reinstated, and he was back again. She enclosed inquiries from firms in Yorkshire, Wilts, North and South Ireland and Denmark, who had heard of the results obtained by Dr. O'Sullivan and who asked for particulars of the new feeding stuff, wanting to know on what terms they could have it for sale. A note from Ackworth reported anomalous behaviour of one batch of the 'SUNSAP' made on the new plant. It had been standing in barrels for two months and it was *crystallizing*. The crystals gave the glucose osazone, and in solution rotated the plane of polarized light fifty-two point five degrees to the right. They were practically

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pure d. Glucose. Then Miss Theta sent a long communication — her letters were not so succinct as her conversation — saying the work on accessory growth factors was giving unexpected results, 'SUNSAP' had increased the fertility of her rats by ten per cent, and the rats' skeletons were remarkably strong and well formed.

But the satisfaction Pry derived from all this news was completely negatived by a 'Private and Confidential' letter from the Chairman, who wrote:

'... following the interest shown by the Kougelhof group in "SUNSAP", as reported to me by Mr. Kosoff, I have taken an opportunity of discussing the synthetics with Lord Houndsditch, at my Club. Lord Houndsditch has promised to exert his influence with the Co-ordinated Defence and Vital Industries Control Board to arrange a meeting between their technical men and ours, with a view to their considering whether any of their component companies can be recommended to acquire the synthetics business at this stage. I have requested that the meeting shall be deferred until your return, as I think it desirable that the fullest reports of progress on the Continent should be put before the Coda with all the process information ...'

Pry was filled with cold fury and dismay. Now that 'SUNSAP' had come successfully through its second great test, and its fitness for sale as a foodstuff had been proven — or at least sufficiently proven for them to forge ahead — all the Board wanted to do was to sell out to the Coda.

The Coda, combination of all the great combines,

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piously formed of its own initiative to 'assist' the Nominal Government; the merger that was not a merger; the Star Chamber of powerful industrialists who surrendered none of the advantages of operating through individual Joint Stock Companies; but who had pushed the process of corporation and amalgamation to the last refinement of profitability; the self-elected shadow government of England.

If the Coda bought the business it would only be to suppress it, Kosoff was right there, for the Coda had far too much capital in the sugar beet industry and in cane plantations ever to make sugar from the air. The only way they could use it would be to extort yet another subsidy from the Nominal Government for putting up a plant to make sugar from the air in time of war. They could make a fine stunt in their newspapers with that. But even so, what of himself; was he, Pry, just to be pitched out on to industrialism's human scrap heap again? The Coda would not want him, knowing the process, they would not want him, they bought their chemists and engineers on degrees and paper qualifications in the cheapest market — people who can do anything *once they have been shown how*; their traffic was in the *fait accompli*; they bought ready-made the devalued products of faith, enterprise and other men's hope . . . But the Coda would not buy *yet*; and all the Board would do would be to give away vital information to all their principal competitors, to tell them everything, to lay the secrets of sugar from the air, trustingly, in an ever-open hand.

Mr. Kosoff, whom Pry joined again in Paris that day,

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was elated. The Board were pleased with him for making contact with the Kougelhof group through Carrosse, and, as they were now whooping after the big combines, had sent him off with many expressions of confidence to contact, if he could, A. G. Nahrungs-industrie in Germany, the third corner of one of the Coda's little international triangles.

'It is good, yes? . . . You are very pleased?'

'I don't see how you can expect me to be pleased about it.'

Mr. Kosoff favoured Pry with a look, which was, for him, singularly obtuse. 'But there is possibilities . . . very big deal . . . the Board will *all* sell . . . once again will be much money . . . all loss, all big loss on Quartzburg and Bingham works, everything, all will come good . . . don't you want . . . ?'

'I am not a Director, Mr. Kosoff. I want to go on with my job, not to get out of it. And I have no financial interest in the business.'

'You want interest in the business? I will immediately give to you four, five thousand shares. At once, when we are again in London, General Thump shall make transfer.'

'That is extremely kind of you.'

'That is right, I want you shall not thank me, you shall have interest in business.'

The last quotation on the Stock Exchange for the ordinary five shilling shares was three farthings. So that five thousand would be worth fifteen pounds twelve shillings and sixpence less brokerage. Mr. Kosoff was altogether too generous.

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'We shall immediately go to Boulevard & Carrosse; now is the business ripe; we shall everything make, and finish.'

In the Boulevard Machiavel it was apparent that something had gone wrong: M. Carrosse was there, and M. Boulevard *fils*, and M. Sarrebouche and two other gentlemen. Their faces were grave. They were devastated to inform M. Kosoff that since their last conference in Paris, there had been events, there were now circumstances, which made it imperative that Société Boulevard & Carrosse must be put into liquidation. A thousand pities, but their interest in 'SUNSAP' automatically was terminated.

M. Kosoff expressed the most profound sentiments of regret, and when they were once again outside, he said, 'Now we must immediately find new agent, if you please, I shall speak on telephone. . . .' Company promoters, Pry reflected, are like gastropods. When one scheme is bitten off short their optimism at once extrudes another in its place.

Kosoff and Pry left that evening for Berlin. 'I do not travel by air,' said Kosoff. 'My wife, she does not permit.' A pity, thought Pry, for the risk of sudden death, at that moment, appeared greatly preferable to the certain vitiation and night- and day-long suffering in the Metropa car.

The Hôtel Luxus, overlooking the architectural horrors of Potsdam, was very little improvement on the train; its lounge was like the platform of Oxford Circus Underground station at a rush hour, but hot, clammy and unventilated. Without leaving any time

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for a bath, Kosoff said: 'We shall now have dinner.' The dinner included raw herrings served with cream, vodka, and several other violent drinks and dishes of Uranian origin. An unholy place, *Urania*.

This dinner commenced the orgy of pure eating, which was to distinguish and mark out these few days' stay in Berlin, from all other days in the memory of Pry's life. Kosoff went to so many restaurants and stayed in each for such a long time, eating, or playing with food when he could eat no more, that Pry at last conceived the idea that he must be looking for somebody. But not Klamac, this time, surely, for he went to the most expensive night clubs, little foreign restaurants in back streets, luxury hotels and the *Café Berlin*, with great impartiality.

Between meals they interviewed the *Krausmann Aktiengesellschaft*. It was a small business house, unworthy of Mr. Kosoff's personal preparations. Herr Krausmann was very stout, very prosy, with an anxious routing way of going into details. He spoke a debased sort of German, throaty, redundant and unclearly articulated; and the effect of hearing his unemphasized mouthing for long stretches at a time, was to bring Pry uncomfortably near the point of being sick. But Herr Krausmann was an honest man: he did not know why Klamac had come to him, his business was so small, he could not afford to lay out any money for propaganda, or to spend money going to see people, unless he could see to cover his expenses from the commissions. '*SUNSAP*' could not be sold in Germany until it had been registered as an approved commodity, after prescribed

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tests, by the Deutsche Nahrungsmittel und Tierkultur Institut.

The full analysis must be disclosed; with exact particulars of the uses for which it was to be sold; the amount to be fed to each kind of animal, and the composition of the ration in which it was to be employed. The heavy machinery of German officialism would then begin to revolve, and in the course of three years, the fitness or otherwise of the product for sale in Germany would be ground out. The firm offering the material for registration would be called upon to pay for the tests: which would be in two stages, first the preliminary or *Vorprüfung*; so many Reichmarks for each kind of animal according to a definite price list; and each test would be repeated in six institutes, distributed over the Reich; and if these tests, carried out in exact accordance with the maker's instructions, proved successful, the product would in course of time be admitted to the *Haupiprüfung*, or main tests, which would involve a great many more animals, and would cost a very large sum of money indeed. In the end, unless it were found that some alteration in the ration or method of use was advisable — in which case the trials would have to start all over again from the beginning — and unless the economic and political authorities decided that the inclusion of the foreign product on the register was for any reason undesirable, the product would be registered. And the foreign firm and its agents would be free to try and introduce it on the German market.

The English *Herren* might think that the results of

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the tests, once the machinery had been put in motion, would depend entirely on the properties of the substance under examination. This was not so, the stuff would require most careful and attentive shepherding through the official machine: there would be voluminous correspondence, and the research officers would have to be encouraged. No, there was no such thing as bribery in the *Nahrungsmittelkundeversuchsorganisation*. But the big combines endowed the research stations, made heavy contributions to their benevolent associations, and gave individual workers interesting holidays in the cause of science; they would understand ways and means had to be found. Herr Krausmann explained that he was a merchant, he sold things in order to make a living, a meagre living, for his family. He would like very much to have the agency for 'SUNSAP', as the big combines left him only one or two odds and ends of things that he could sell, but first to shepherd 'SUNSAP' through the Vor and the Haupt Prüfung; he was sorry he had not the money nor the time. Perhaps if the English company would pay him every year a thousand Reichmarks — but he was also himself a business man, he did not suggest it. They would do best to take away his agency, a pity, but he could not afford . . .

Kosoff and Pry talked it over in the Adolf Restaurant; which was a Kosher Restaurant, albeit the symbols had been painted out and Adolf painted in. The boiled young hen was very good.

'Refreshing to meet an honest man,' said Pry.

'Krausmann I do not like; he is a little man, he

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must count every pfennig, in that way cannot good business be done.'

'But sensible, don't you think . . .?'

'Zck, so comes not a fortune, I shall again speak him.'

Kosoff was rather at a loss in Berlin; there was no sign of any influential contacts. No approach to the magnates of the A.G.N. It was obvious that Krausmann, with his little local business in kitchenware, hotel soap and garden utensils, was not the man for the job. Perhaps Kosoff in this quest in the restaurants was looking for somebody. But that afternoon he attacked Krausmann again, trying to persuade him against all sense and reason.

'You ask I shall have five hundred Reichmarks only, and you will pay for the Prüfung, the postages, the travels? It is possible, but I do not like: I am afraid, that soon when begin the tests, the big combines will from the research stations obtain informations. Then they will make under a German name the same thing in Germany, and after so much trouble there will come for me no business. Everywhere in the research stations are scholars of the A.G.N. They are so pleased to have scholarships, they take to A.G.N. all information. Is it not so in England?'

'Why, yes,' said Pry. 'The Coda give scholarships for their nominees to work in all the "independent" research stations.'

Kosoff drew his chair up to the desk, and began to speak with a new urgency. The A.G.N.? He was sure that the tests would come to the knowledge of the A.G.N.?

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'I mean before they start, at once with the application to the institute, the A.G.N. will have knowledge; there is in Germany so much intrigue, without permission of the A.G.N. the tests will not begin; they have so much power, in politics is always the A.G.N.'

'Then must the tests at once be arranged.'

The anxious, worried face of Herr Krausmann was turned to Kosoff with incomprehension and surprise. 'You mean that your English firm will give all at once to the A.G.N., I do not understand.'

'Hydro-Mechanical Constructions Ltd. is not small Company, it is Big Business, on the Board most important people, Lord Lambsbottam and Sir Willin Clutch, we shall all arrange with the Coda and the A.G.N. For you it will be very good, you will do all the work, everything is in your hands, and when comes the big deal, you will be agents for the A.G.N. It shall be conditional. Then also becomes the Krausmann Company big business.'

Herr Krausmann would talk it over with his son, but there must be five hundred Reichmarks for the first year, and the travels and the postages . . .

Herr Krausmann invited them to dinner that evening and paid for their two two-mark meals as well as the beer, it was worth that much to him. Walter Krausmann, his son, also came, dressed in one of the clean-looking khaki uniforms of the Nazi organization, with a swastika armlet. He spoke almost perfect English and except for the uniform would have passed in England for one of the very best products of the English public schools; he was physically fit, well

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groomed, self confident, but with a pleasing reserve of manner and not a little sense of humour. His favourite pastimes were revolver practice and canoeing on the Elbe. He had recently completed his course in Commerce and Economics at the university, and was then learning his father's business. He would be very glad to travel with Mr. Pry to visit the regional headquarters of the Tierkultur Institutes in Hanover and Bavaria. It would be enjoyable, and it would afford him an opportunity to learn about the new product, in order to assist his father, but . . . the travels would cost rather much money . . . Mr. Kosoff said of course Hydro-Mechanicals would pay, and the atmosphere became distinctly friendly. Much more friendly, and much more effective and practical, Pry reflected, over Kalbschnitzel and beer for two marks, than any of the conferences in Paris or Rome, where the entertainment had cost twenty times as much. It was pleasant to find people who refused, of necessity or principle, to pay more for food than it was worth.

'You know,' Pry confided in Walter Krausmann, when they had reached the Rhineland, and had already struck up a friendship, which had little to do with 'SUNSAP', 'it is really an awful waste of time and money, trying to sell "SUNSAP" in Germany, when we haven't even yet started to sell it in England.'

'You are fortunate in England, to have so much money, in Germany we are very poor.'

'Our Directors feel that the business is not worthy of them, unless we have foreign agents; selling English

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goods in England is too much like shopkeeping — altogether too *petit bourgeois*. Now Mr. Kosoff will return to the Board, and say that with very great tact and discretion he has established through your father a most valuable contact with the A.G.N.'

'I do not understand, in Germany we protect our industrial secrets. We cannot afford to give such things away. I do not think the A.G.N. will come to us, they will try to make your synthetic sugar themselves, they have thousands of chemists, they will pay nothing to you. But my father has much experience, and he is of a different mind.'

The journey through Germany was pleasant enough; the white-coated Professor-Organizers spoke clear-cut technical German, Pry could understand and even take an intelligent part in the conversations; and although they said enough to arouse interest in 'SUNSAP' or 'SONSAFT' as it was to be called in German, the outcome was little more than the obtaining of entry and application forms. For the rest, Pry saw a good deal of Germany's pageant of uniforms, remarking in the new militarism a spiritual element lacking in the drab, greed and fear-begotten militarism of England and France. Whatever its object, it was affirmative and universal, and, with one miserable exception, it was binding all classes, and destroying the squalor of class distinctions. There seemed to be oak leaves entwined about the German sword, and there was nothing brutal, or drab, or suspicious about Walter Krausmann, though it is true he went out of his way, in the Rhine-land, in order that he might show his English friend a

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memorial, which commemorated the end of the French occupation.

It was not polished and it was not pretty, for it represented a woman of great physical strength, rising with a terrible absence of hatred, after having been raped. It held no threat of vengeance against her violator, but by the way the body emerged from the unsculpt stone, the way the forearm swept before the eyes, it was revealed that what had been forced into her womb would be expelled and would die, that no shame would remain, but that the strength of muscles and sinews was rigid as stone.

Walter and Pry stood subdued before the power of this sculpture, and Walter at last said: 'I think that is very beautiful, but it is now no more.'

Kosoff awaited Walter Krausmann and Pry on their return to Berlin, and was gratified that so many application forms had been obtained. Whilst they had been away, he too had been successful, he had found the man for whom he had been looking, an inquiry agent that he had set on the heels of Klamac, and who owed him some money, having failed in the piece of work for which he was engaged. Mr. Kosoff had also met in Berlin a fellow conspirator from Urania, who had a hat full of schemes, and was busily engaged in grafting foreign goods into Poland and Russia, through connections in proper quarters. 'I think,' said Kosoff, 'we must now at once go to Warsaw.' But Pry had had enough, and Warsaw was not altogether a healthy place for Mr. Kosoff, so they went home.

## CHAPTER XXI

## A MAN OF STRAW

MICHAEL PRY, at the age of seven weeks, had lost much of his original ugliness. He had already begun to come to terms with the world, and, deceived by the tender ministrations of his mother, was beginning to take it, to some extent, on trust. The compression and squeezing together of the soft bones of his skull, which occurred at birth, had nearly disappeared; the ear, which had been doubled over, was turning back, and only the bulging forehead, the short black hair, and the resentful eyes, remained of the look of extreme age and embitterment with which he had entered the world. Mary said he had been getting younger day by day, and as Pry and Mary stood beside his cot, adoringly regarding him in his nakedness before pinning on his napkins for the night, Michael Pry was frankly contemptuous of their attention. He was experimenting in stretching out his legs. It surprised him very much that he could do this, and as it was an entirely new experience for him, he was more than a little afraid. His knees would straighten a little, and he would hesitate, sensible of the endlessness of space into which his toes might pioneer, then he would take the awful plunge, extend himself to his full twenty-six inches, a tremendous muscular effort, which he sustained with the expression of a weight

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lifter, an expression which changed by degrees, in the relief of finding a limit, to one of rapt attention to his new state.

'Bless him,' said Mary, hugging him up. 'So like his father.'

A remark which, at that time, was not at all inapt, for Pry too was adventuring into strange worlds, and taking stock of his position. Synthesizing sugar from the air, and building the new plant, for all the difficulties by the way, were things to which Pry had taken as naturally as a duck takes to water. The tour on the Continent, which had been a nightmare in anticipation, was over, and it had been quite painless, even agreeable in parts. But now some very strange country lay ahead, which he would have to traverse. He would have to *sell* 'SUNSAP' for the simple reason that there was no one else to do it, and everywhere he looked the world of commerce appeared as a mad topsy-turvia for which a dramatist's knowledge of human perversity would be a far better equipment than his own scientific habit of basing courses of action on reason, probability and fact. To manipulate a reluctant world into buying 'SUNSAP', to voyage down the labyrinthine and obstructed channels of commercial exploitation, to save 'SUNSAP' meanwhile from the combines who gangstered the racket . . . He yearned for the familiar waters of his technical duckpond; why couldn't he be left to synthesize starch?

The next awful, inescapable bugbear, was the 'Literature'. Before a ton of 'SUNSAP' could be sold, the farmers must have exact practical directions for

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feeding the stuff to their animals; and on these directions, no less than on the properties of the stuff itself, 'SUNSAP' would succeed or fail. For Pry, who had never so much as kept rabbits, the responsibility of laying down such directions was alarming enough, but it was inextricably involved with the even more complicated matter of the 'Selling Price'. If the Company had not squandered their capital in the past, it would have been easy for them to sustain an initial loss, to sell 'SUNSAP' at once at something like the price it could be sold for with large-scale production; to put out money to build up a business, what else is capital for? But that was mere crying over spilt milk. 'SUNSAP' had to be sold at a price which would show an immediate profit; it had to be sold at one and a half times its economic value, and in the face of competition — notably that of molasses, already a drug on the market. Nor was that all, for in the only territory in which Pry had ever seen any real possibility of sales, namely the British Isles, Graball and Sons of Dimchester had a stranglehold: if they had to receive a rake-off of thirty-five per cent, with perquisites, that too would have to be loaded on to the price. Until Graball's had been dealt with the selling price could not be determined.

The literature would have to contain something much more than information; striking and forceful arguments would have to be found to induce farmers to cease feeding their animals in the traditional manner, and substitute rations containing 'SUNSAP', a new thing about which little was known. That in itself was a piece of special pleading, seeming to demand a most

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intimate knowledge of the mentality of farmers, of the arts of animal husbandry, and of the qualities in beasts to which the hopes of farmers and butchers are directed. But in addition to that the farmer had to be persuaded to pay *more* for his feed when he used 'SUNSAP'. 'SUNSAP' would have to be something more than ordinary food — something more than treacle, but nothing so common as a patent medicine. Pry saw that he would have to create, out of headache and mental stress, a complete aura of immaterial attributes for 'SUNSAP'; the catch phrases, the plausible arguments, the salted half-truths, the sales talk, a whole vast system of magic for 'SUNSAP'. It would be sixpenny-worth syrup and threepennyworth magic, and the magic would have to be good.

Pry never once doubted that he would find ways of doing all this, if his enthusiasm and his faith held, so long as the winning and giving to mankind of this new food remained for him a bright and glorious ideal; so long as 'SUNSAP' was not taken away from him, Pry knew that no matter what the difficulties he would win through. The literature *would* be written; 'SUNSAP' *would* be sold; its real properties would be determined, the demand would increase, the factory would grow from its small beginning, the price would come down, the by-products would bring in more revenue, a great new industry would be established. It would change the face of the world, for one acre of irradiation plant would produce more food than five hundred acres under potatoes or corn. Pry prepared himself for a couple of months of gruelling mental

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work; for he knew how hard a taskmaster his own will could be. His most comforting reflection was that at the end of that time he would be able to look back and see the literature behind him, as he now saw the Continental tour; but in this he reckoned without the Board.

Pry had never seen the Board so animated, or so pleased with themselves, as they were at their first meeting immediately following his return with Mr. Kosoff from the Continent. They greeted both Kosoff and himself as little short of conquering heroes, and began by passing a resolution of thanks to them, jointly and individually, on the great success of their tour. It was, the Board felt, a direct consequence of the tour, that they were now in contact with the Coda. Mr. Pry must be set free to continue such invaluable activities. They waved aside his protest that he had now to prepare the literature, and settle such things as the agents' discounts and the selling price; that was only for the home market. He must understand he was a valuable man, and they had better things than that for him to do. He was, they felt, inclined to be a little too humble in his outlook.

'What is this literature?' demanded Mr. Herbert P. Ketch. 'Booklets and a few circulars . . .'

'Such things do not come into existence spontaneously.'

But two months to prepare them, a matter at the most of three or four thousand words, did Mr. Pry realize that he, Mr. Ketch, when he had to prepare speeches for his constituency, frequently dictated more

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than that to his secretary before lunch? Had not Mr. Pry a typist at the works?

Pry said nothing.

The Chairman looked up over his spectacles, he felt sure, speaking for himself, that Mr. Pry would have no difficulty in dictating the literature within the next day or two, and it could then be printed whilst he was away; Mr. Kosoff had made certain suggestions about further tours; and Mr. Pry could be released from the greater part of his other duties, as soon as the conference with the Coda had been held. Mr. Cloacher was not busy in the garden ornaments department, and the Board had always felt that it would be advisable for him to take over the whole of the works management, leaving Mr. Pry free . . .

Pry went very white and rose abruptly from his chair. If the manufacture of 'SUNSAP' was taken out of his hands, and the new plant and the laboratories put in Mr. Cloacher's charge, he would immediately resign from the Company's service.

Pry was himself aghast at what he had said — give up his food from the air? Yes, and he would too, he meant what he said, and the Board knew it. The ultimatum took them aback, for they had never even contemplated that Mr. Pry might leave them, of course he would always be there — who else knew anything about the synthetics business — putting Mr. Cloacher in charge of the works was merely a matter of 'organization'.

Pry flung all discretion to the wind. 'You take no interest in the real development of your business, and

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you refuse to let me have time to get on with it. Your only concern is to be done with it, to sell out to the Coda, you want me for that, to disclose all the information, to throw away my own job . . . I am not a Director and I have no financial interest in the business. Mr. Kosoff's offer of five thousand shares at three farthings each is despicable . . . And if your approaches to the Coda fail, as they certainly will, you want me to go on just for my salary, and for you to turn me out when it suits you at three months' notice . . . And now you propose to take the manufacture, which is the kernel of the work, out of my control, so that I become a sort of salesman and commercial traveller for Mr. Cloacher. You may consider that just and reasonable, and I am a mere employee to do as I am told, but it is not good enough for me. I tell you bluntly, in Mr. Cloacher's presence, that I have too much self respect to accept a position of subservience to Mr. Cloacher. You must find somebody else. . . .'

A bomb hurled amongst the Directors could scarcely have disturbed them more. Through the angry comment, it was the Chairman who said: 'I am, I confess, surprised that Mr. Pry can speak like this, but I am glad, if I may say so, that he has had the courage to open his mind. I, for my part, take no exception to his frankness, and I should not like him to feel, in leaving this meeting, that he will in any way be penalized for it. Now, gentlemen, if there are no other matters, this meeting is adjourned . . . next Friday, at three o'clock.'

Pry, not trusting himself to talk just then with either Kosoff or Mr. Leary, hurried away from the Board

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room, and went home, whence he rang up Zaareb to tell him all about it. Zaareb reminded him that five hundred pounds a year was not a bad salary, asked him if he would like to go back to engineering at six or seven pounds a week, and gently told him that his affairs were his own concern, and that he, Zaareb, would not presume to advise him, except to take some bromide before going to the next Board meeting.

Mary refused to worry because they might tell Pry to get on and resign if he wanted to. She was getting used to bivouacking on the edge of a precipice, and anyway it wouldn't come to that. The Board would flutter and screech at each other, but in the end they'd do nothing, just wait for it all to blow over.

But in this Mary was partially wrong; for at half-past nine that evening, Pry's elaboration of all the things he might have told the Board, if he had only thought of them in time, was interrupted by a telephone call.

It was Mr. Leary, speaking from the Nominal Club, and he desired to tell Mr. Pry at once of the Chairman's decision, that he, Mr. Pry, was to have an immediate cash bonus of five hundred pounds, in recognition of his special technical services to the Company.

*'Well, thank you very much,'* said Pry. *'I, eh . . .'*

*'But there's one thing about which I want to warn you. Don't touch those shares of Mr. Kosoff's. On no account accept them as a present. It would be misinterpreted.'*

*'Oh, I understand,'* said Pry. *'I will not accept any favours from Mr. Kosoff.'*

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'Buy them from him, if you want them, but write to Mr. Kosoff at once, and send me a copy of your letter. Good night to you now.'

Mary delayed even the baby's ten o'clock feed to talk this over. 'What do you make of it?' Pry asked her, when he had repeated the short conversation verbatim, as though it had been a poem.

'I think,' said Mary, 'that you got a high old time on the Continent for playing up to Kosoff, and now you get five hundred pounds from the other camp. Like your horrid Coda in peace and war, you get profit out of both sides.'

'Anyway it all comes out of the Company's pocket, it doesn't cost Kosoff anything, and the five hundred pounds won't cost Leary and the Chairman anything, either, so one must take a broader view, the nominal view, and put it in the bank, for services rendered.'

Pry was a little dazzled by this sudden windfall. By morning he had sobered down, and was again looking straight ahead. The five hundred pounds was a side issue; they would buy a really good piano for Snoot House, that would afford so much real, immediate and lasting pleasure; and the remainder they would put in National Savings Certificates. At some time in the future it would buy a year's economic freedom. That was the size of it, for what he had done, Industrialism had been graciously pleased to give him one year's free pardon. How many people struggle all their lives and never get so much as that, until they are old, or sick, or they go insane.

For five hundred pounds he said thank you very

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much, it remained to be seen whether the Board, blind to the major issue, would permit him to continue his work, the synthesis of food, that brought to fruition would be his life's work, a contribution to Science that would stand for all time associated with his name. It was that he wanted now, not five hundred pounds.

We are not always confronting, we have not always access to the major principles that determine the direction of our lives. Between times we play about the line. It was so with Pry; awaiting the crucial decision of the Board, he had many pleasurable anticipations of five hundred pounds, was encouraged and happy because of it, and tackled details of his work with a great zest, putting from him the thought that it might never be finished. He told Mary with great solemnity that the secret of Life is to go on living until you are dead; and occupied himself, amongst other things, with some diagrams of a cow, in process of dissolving its own skeleton.

Professor Oldbuck of the Roedean Institute had explained to Pry that dairy cows sometimes withdraw a little calcium from their own bones, dissolve their own skeletons, as it were, to maintain the correct amount of calcium in the milk for their calves. 'SUN-SAP' would provide the cows with calcium and prevent this alarming occurrence. If he could make two good diagrams, one of a cow with a good, strongly calcified skeleton, and another of an unfortunate cow with its skeleton in process of dissolving away, it would be a telling illustration for the literature. As Pry could not draw a cow, he traced one from a book, superimposed

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the bones on to it from another page, and experimented on the result with water colours. A good many diagrams had to be scrapped, because the cow got a frightened or balmy look, or because its bones did not fit very well, but in the end he had a pair of diagrams that would do, not too inartistic or funny, and striking enough to make anybody sit up and take notice. The preparation of the 'Literature' had begun.

The preliminary skirmishes with the matter were interesting enough: the preparation of O'Sullivan's photograph of his prize sow and fourteen eager pigs for the front cover; the bit about the pale amber coloured 'SUNSAP', with its pleasant almond flavour, which could not be other than pure since it was made only from the fresh air of the English countryside in summer sunshine; the 'blah' about glucose, lifted almost bodily from the 'literature' of the firms selling glucose at fancy prices for human consumption, with grave warnings about acidosis and ketosis; the suggestion that the new pleasant-flavoured essence of fresh air should find a use in vitamin confectionery; the intriguing paragraph in which the assistance of the public would be invited, in making experiments (at their own risk) with free samples of this new product of British industry — a way of saying that very little was yet known about it, and of leading up to the 'Conditions of Sale', which would say that the directions for use were compiled by experts, and based on the reports of official research stations, but that owing to the wide differences in the food requirements of different animals, the user must regard them as suggestions

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only, and that as a purely formal matter, the manufacturers accepted no liability for any consequences that might follow the use of their product, according to the instructions or otherwise. This last would have to be printed in exceedingly small type.

All these ideas for illustrations and scraps of the text Pry put together in a spring-back file, but the real job, that of beating them all into shape and giving the real directions for feeding 'SUNSAP' to cattle and pigs, in language that the farmer would understand, that would at the same time sound to him scientific, and that never made the fatal mistake of misusing a term of the farmer's jargon, all this remained to be done. It hung over Pry like an incubus; it did not matter that he wanted of all things to get it done, that it had to be done, that everything now waited on its being done. Pry, as an animal, just shied at it, and put it off. He was self-ashamedly grateful for any distraction. The Board provided plenty of distractions. They came quickly and in rapid succession.

The first was the Management Committee. This was the cunning idea of Mr. Leary and the Chairman, and it was intended to reconcile two opposing points of view. It was to give Mr. Cloacher virtual control of the whole works and at the same time satisfy Mr. Pry, who had said that he would resign the moment that happened. A first meeting of the Committee was held, not very tactfully in Mr. Cloacher's office, to vote on its own existence. The Management Committee would be composed of the Chairman, Mr. Leary, Mr. Cloacher and Mr. Pry, and it would decide the func-

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tions of its component members. The scheme came to grief, first because the intractable Mr. Pry denounced it as a mere device for outvoting him three to one on the issue of who should run the works, and said that, Management Committee or no Management Committee, five hundred pounds or no five hundred pounds, he would still resign, the moment the control of the 'SUNSAP' work was taken away from him. Secondly, the Kosoff faction on the Board bitterly opposed the scheme, demanding to know why Mr. Leary should be on the Committee and not Mr. Kosoff, and accusing Mr. Leary of a desire to push himself into the position of Managing Director. As there was some truth in this last, it was met by Mr. Leary with the righteous anger proper to an outraged Methodist, and the Management Committee was forgotten in the turmoil of a new major row.

Then the Chairman's decision to give Mr. Pry a bonus of five hundred pounds, which he had made in conference with Mr. Leary only, and without reference to the rest of the Board, was met with violent opposition by the Marquis of Dillwater, Mr. Kosoff, Major T. Haw-Stag, and Sir Willin Clutch. By the Marquis because, he said, Mr. Pry was a mere man of straw, with whom the Board ought not to condescend to negotiate, and by the other gentlemen, not because they minded Mr. Pry having five hundred pounds, but because the decision made without reference to them was in the highest degree improper, and interpretable only as part of a conspiracy to exclude them from the conduct of the Company's affairs.

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Mr. Leary retorted that Mr. Kosoff should not be on the Board at all, he had done enough harm already, and if some of the shareholders had their way, he would be in prison. And as for Sir Willin Clutch, he never opened his mouth, and everybody knew his only use was to make up a quorum when the Marquis of Dillwater was away dirt-track racing.

But because of the supposed danger of a Kosoff-Klamac *bloc*, the Kosoff faction had to be conciliated, and the outcome was that the Chairman climbed down from the proposal to pay Mr. Pry the five hundred pounds as a cash bonus, and agreed that only two hundred pounds should be paid in cash, at some time when the Company could conveniently spare the money, and the other three hundred pounds Mr. Pry should be given a chance to earn, as a commission on the sales of 'SUNSAP' over a period of one year.

The Chairman was also brought to agree that it would be grossly unfair to pay this bonus to Mr. Pry, without paying a corresponding, but somewhat greater, bonus to Mr. Cloacher, who was an older man, and had made almost superhuman efforts to assist the Company in shifting the bird bath business to East Bullock. So Mr. Cloacher should have three hundred pounds in cash and four hundred pounds in the form of a commission on the 'SUNSAP' sales.

As for the tenure of Mr. Pry, he should have an agreement for one year, and Mr. Cloacher should also have an agreement for one year, their salaries remaining unchanged, and they would be *expected to agree between themselves on the degree of co-operation best*

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*suited to the business.* If at the end of one year certain stipulated results in the synthetics and garden ornaments businesses, respectively, had been attained, *both* Mr. Pry and Mr. Cloacher should become Managing Directors.

This last would encourage them, and there was little danger in putting it in, as of course, in a few weeks now they would have sold everything to the Coda, and the difficulties would be liquidated.

Pry did not fail to remark on this, and as an after-thought it was added that the total sums of seven hundred pounds for Mr. Cloacher and five hundred for Mr. Pry were guaranteed, and should be paid to those gentlemen even if the Company went into liquidation, or its businesses were sold. This, as Major T. Haw-Stag said, gave the Company just five hundred pounds worth of hold on the indispensable Mr. Pry until the deal with the Coda had been put through — all they needed for a man in his position. But the provision was really made because of the one tough spot in the character of the Chairman, which the rest of the Board could not get over. The Chairman had promised Pry that he should have five hundred pounds, and no Lambsbottam, since the time of bloody Judge Jefferies, had ever failed to honour a promise.

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ONE effect of Pry's stand, over and above the promise of five hundred pounds for himself and seven hundred for Mr. Cloacher, was that the Board began to take an almost hysterical interest in the patent position. So far they had proceeded deliberately under cover of Cocaine's old patent, which disclosed nothing, and was a good enough blind to what they were really doing. But now Mr. Cloacher had whispered to the Board, via Kosoff, that Mr. Pry had shown his hand in threatening to resign, and that there was no limit to the evil he might do — he might walk off with the secret processes in his pocket. The company must at once have patents, fullest patents for everything, and in all countries.

It was in vain for Pry to say that they could not patent the processes and at the same time keep them secret, and that when the patents were made public the big combines, whose resources ran into hundreds of millions, would say: for this information thank you very much, we shall now use it as we think fit, and if you don't like it — try and stop us. That was just craft on the part of Mr. Pry. The big combines were gentlemen, they would never do a thing like that.

It was in vain for Zaareb to remark that the patents would afford no protection, and would not be of much

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use unless the Board had the resources and were prepared to fight infringements up to the House of Lords; that the patents would cost many thousands of pounds, and that the money would appear to be required for working capital; that patent agents are the most expensive of all the parasites on Industry. The Board could be very obstinate and they were obstinate about this. On the cost — they would compromise, they would not have patents in the United States or Germany or Japan, and there were one or two other countries they would not bother about, but for the rest, patents they must have and at once, a good clutch of patents. It was expenditure on 'Defence', which must have priority over everything else; they must defend their industrial property.

So Dr. Pinion, of Pinion, Schüster & Cam, the Company's patent agents, went to East Bullock and took voluminous notes from Dr. Zaareb and Mr. Pry about the processes in the new plant. He had been called in before, at the time of the discovery of the blue catalyst and trigger action, to report on the patentability of the processes. With the help of a small army of dyspeptic old men, in bowler hats, routing in that mortuary of human hopefulness, the Patent Office, he had produced an 'opinion'. It had run to some eighty foolscap pages, cost the Company four hundred guineas, and it had set forth several hundred claims made by inventors in the past, which the Patent Office Examiners might and probably would quote against them. Messrs. Pinion, Schüster & Cam now advised the Board, however, that with their skill in draughts-

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manship and argument, they felt confident of obtaining strong patents, but the subject matter must be divided into three parts, that is to say, three patents must be applied for instead of one, in all countries, thus incidentally, trebling the cost.

The advice of Pinion, Schüster & Cam was not to be questioned; the Board could only act on the recommendations of their advisers; the Company's patent agents were instructed to proceed. In only one matter did the Board intervene, and that was about the patent for Pry's trigger action and the use of low temperature heat; if this were in Pry's name it might involve some arrangement with Mr. Pry, so that Messrs. Pinion, Schüster & Cam would kindly arrange for these inventions to be covered by a patent of addition to M. Cocaine's original patent, and in M. Cocaine's name. The blue catalyst was no bother, Dr. Zaareb dictated the whole specification, in wording on which no patent agent would presume to improve, disclosed the whole thing, as to a learned society, and with no thought of self interest, assigned the patent outright to the Company. The Board took that as a matter of course and did not so much as thank him. The novel use of gases from power station chimneys and of waste heat from the condensers, had to be patented in Pry's name, because the name of the original inventor must appear for the patent to be valid, and no stretch of the imagination could discover anyone but Mr. Pry who could be said to have invented that. But the Board demanded an assignment of the whole rights in the invention, as it was made by an employee in the course

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of the duties in which he was engaged. As the laws of England, operating in this case as in so many others to the advantage of the (presumed) mighty, decreed that his invention was the sole property of the Company, Pry signed the assignment, said nothing, and received no acknowledgment. But he talked it over with Zaareb.

‘You are lucky to get five hundred pounds, if you ever do get it. What about me? I made no bones about assigning my part, and I have asked for nothing. I do my work, this is not my first contribution to Science, and I am not going to allow people like our Directors to presume to reward or congratulate me. You pretend to want to give your work to the world, don’t you? Now that you are forced to do so, what cause have you to complain?’

‘I am beginning to feel, Dr. Zaareb, that my real reward in all this is the privilege of association with people like you.’

‘And you are not the first young man who has told me that — now what is all this latest nonsense with the Coda?’

The meeting with the technical men from the Coda had been delayed, and the filing of the provisional patent specifications scrambled through against time, in order that the meeting might not take place before they were filed. An unprecedented piece of caution on the part of the Board, only marred by the fact that the haste in filing the specifications resulted in a number of omissions and inadvisable inclusions, which could have been avoided with more consideration, and which later

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cost the Company a great deal of money to put right.

But the Board could not restrain their impatience to 'approach' the Coda. Since the last General Meeting but one, when people in the 'City' began to inquire where all the money had gone, the Directors, who with the exception of Mr. Kosoff had never been wide awake enough to get anything significant out of it for themselves, had relinquished their Directors' fees, until their undertakings should show a profit. The Board meetings were a nuisance, and nothing could suit them better than an honourable 'get-out' by a sale to the Coda. But the sanguine imagination of Mr. Kosoff had revealed to them a further possibility very attractive indeed. The Coda might not pay them in cash and in full *all* they proposed to ask for the intangible assets: processes, patents, goodwill, etc., but they would pay a substantial sum in cash, plus a royalty on every ton of 'SUNSAP' they made for fourteen years, the duration of the patents. Then the Company could go on, as an Investment Company, with comfortable Directors' fees, and nothing to do but manipulate investments and pay out dividends. A really high class Company. It would serve as a background, also, for . . . well, gilt-edged speculation, and a little insurance and some nice mortgages. A green pasture, with no messing about with sugar and factories and inventors and concrete houses and bird baths or any of that sort of thing. The Lambsbottam-Leary caucus had even gone so far as to draft a little preliminary scheme. . . .

The Board room was redecorated for the conference with the Coda. Lord Lambsbottam and the full Board

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were there; Dr. Juvenal Slepe and Captain Weeder from the Coda; Dr. Zaareb and Mr. Pry; Mr. Cloacher and Brigadier-General Thump, and all three of the Company's solicitors, Messrs. Hagstone, Brown & Bog. Before the Coda deputation arrived, Pry asked what the general idea was, to what point the conference was to lead. He was regarded with amused surprise: Dr. Slepe was one of the Coda's Big Five, they would see where he would lead.

Dr. Juvenal Slepe was accompanied by a young man, clad in the Monastral blue uniform of His Majesty's Defence Forces. Captain Weeder, of the Auxiliary Supply Corps. Pry regarded him with instinctive dislike; he was small, insolent and nasty, with the hard-muscled body of a lean dog. Dr. Juvenal Slepe was more difficult to place: he was an ascetic individual, very intellectual, even scholarly in appearance, with a fine roman nose and ice-cold, penetrating eyes. He was neither suave nor precise, but very cheerful and, though he obviously never drank anything but cold water, he was pretending to be half tight. He made himself free of the offices at once, chucked General Thump's typist under the chin, and played quoits with his hat and the padlocked machine for imposing the common seal of the Company. He refused to sit down, cocked a finger at the dignified countenance of the Chairman, and suddenly demanded what *he* was doing in that galley.

'Dr. Juvenal Slepe, with whose occupations I happen to be quite familiar,' explained Zaareb, 'likes to be thought eccentric. He desires us to assume that he is

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drunk, so that we may be off our guard. Sit down, Slepe, and don't play the fool.'

Juvenal Slepe sat down, shook hands with Zaareb again across the table, and said, 'You see him — Uncle Zaareb — he's found me out, you can't hide anything from him.' With which he took an enormous cigarette lighter from his pocket, was about to light a cigarette, but changing his mind, unscrewed the cap, and carefully poured half the petrol into the ink.

'Tanks!' said Dr. Slepe. 'Tell me about tanks — all sorts of tanks. I've got to write a speech about tanks. Tanks for the army, tanks for the navy, tanks for God and Lord Houndsditch. You!' he said beseechingly, pointing at Pry, 'please tell me all about tanks — for Sunsap, Sunsop, Allsop, whatever it is, you use tanks?'

'They are made of concrete,' said Pry, and he noticed that Captain Weeder wrote this down.

'Ah, concrete, of course, hard-wearing for the traffic — any good for tombstones?'

'Are you expecting much traffic over *your* grave, Mister Slepe?' countered Pry, determined to break the monopoly of making contemptible jokes. Dr. Slepe ignored the remark. In the rabbit hutches of the Coda he was not accustomed to being answered back.

'Come,' said Zaareb, 'we have had enough of this, what do you want to know?'

'Everything, tell me everything.' Juvenal Slepe quietened down and now pretended to be completely bored.

Dr. Zaareb explained their synthesis of sugar, using

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freely a vocabulary that only a competent and alert physical chemist could possibly understand. Slepe interposed an apparently inane remark now and then, which nevertheless betrayed that nothing had escaped him. He had gripped the thing at the first telling, could recount it all nearly verbatim into a dictaphone later, and would certainly do so. Captain Weeder, laboriously writing away in a note-book, was only a witness. The Coda men always hunted in pairs. Juvenal Slepe was not head of their intelligence staff for nothing.

With no reserve, Dr. Zaareb told everything that had gone into the patent specifications: he held back not one word. And Pry, unable to realize that this information would be public property in any case the moment the patents were open for inspection, heard the disclosure with so much anguish, that Zaareb might have been drawing, one by one, all the teeth out of his head. The blue catalyst, trigger action, the wave-lengths in degrees Ångström, the main to the stack chimney, everything....

Nearly everything, for there were some things that Zaareb, who only came to the works once a week, did not know. Nothing that the Coda might not in time find out for themselves, given the rest, but a little that Pry could still guard and keep to himself. Zaareb, for example, did not know that in one batch, when things had gone wrong, when there was too much carbon monoxide and the temperature got beyond their usual working range, there had been an appreciable yield of glycerine. That should never be known, his

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work should not be turned to the direct production of nitro-glycerin for purposes of war. He could stop that by a simple act of intellectual sabotage. He had often thought of it, seeing Michael sleeping on his nose at home, how like he was to little Pierre in Rheims or Hans in Dusseldorf.

The deputation from the Coda went out to the works that afternoon, and they saw the new plant. It was not working, because, Pry said, it was not worth working in December, and one of the glass mains was broken. It was certainly broken, for Pry had unfortunately dropped a sledge-hammer on it the day before. And it was a great pity they could not have a sample of the blue catalyst, the stock was quite exhausted, the iron safe quite empty, they were about to make a new supply....

But Pry handed to them copies of all the reports from the testing stations, O'Sullivan's, Miss Theta's... and all the costing estimates, every detail of the business handed to them, as the Board had insisted.

'Ah, ha, and what is this?' asked Dr. Slepe, when the awful day was over. He had struck an air of mystery and was pointing at an empty tin.

'Now what,' asked Pry, 'do you think your esteemed Coda is going to do about it all? Our Board will be sure to ask me what impressions you have taken away with you, what hints you may have dropped about your honourable intentions.'

It was Captain Weeder who answered. 'Of course there may be something in it; little firms and indepen-

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dent chemists do sometimes strike by a fluke on something that none of the component companies of any of our associated groups have ever done before, but it's very unusual — after our patent investigators have looked into it. Of course you want us to buy the process; but there's nothing to show yet that it can be worked at sufficient profit for our members to concern themselves. Personally I think you'll have to develop it a lot further before we take it over; *then*, of course, our Executive *might* offer your Board a little for the patents, to save the expense of working out something of our own on the basis of them, if we want it. But we rather take the view that our undertakings are so big, and so closely identified with the national interest that we are really entitled to the benefit of any chance discoveries that may happen to be made outside our framework . . .

Pry pushed his dinner aside that evening; he couldn't eat it. When Mary spoke to him he did not answer. He shut the lid of the new piano, already bought by hire purchase in anticipation of his five hundred pounds. He could bear neither to stay at home nor to go out. He did not want to live.

The rest of the week was for Pry a bleak and dreary waste; the rain, the grey river fog, the blackened and sodden marshes; East Bullock with its nasty picture houses, pubs and fried fish shops, of which he had become all but unconscious, returned to sharp focus again. That was where he was. And in the factory, with this Mr. Cloacher, whose influence like a cancer

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was spreading day by day, undermining even the Chairman's feeling of confidence in him, with a lie here and a lie there, insidiously corrupting everything.

'When,' asked Major Haw-Stag, 'may we expect to see the literature? The Coda should be provided with a complete draft, at the earliest possible moment.'

'It is not ready yet,' said Pry wearily.

And Mr. Cloacher, who had noticed this incident at the Board meeting, although it was no business of his, entered Pry's office the following morning and said, 'How are you, me lord, cold enough for you? Major Haw-Stag is worried about the literature, and the Board won't wait about much longer. I'd better make some excuses for you, give you a little more time . . . we all want a little more time with the family just before Christmas. But just get on with it, will you; there's no magic about it.'

Curious that Cloacher should have used that word *magic*.

The gratuitous, attempted compulsion from Haw-Stag and the interfering Mr. Cloacher did as much as any outside influence could do to make the writing of the literature, which was after all a creative piece of work, hateful to Mr. Pry. He struggled ineffectively with it, trying to piece it together, to steer confident sentences round the snags, overwhelmed with the knowledge that all that was then fluid in his thought must soon be impounded in the leaden irrevocability of the printed word. Oh, that it would only come to *him*, the lightness of mind, the easy flow, the sure, ever-to-be-trusted, winged magic of words.

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It was Kosoff who came to the rescue. He had found another firm who might become agents for France, following the liquidation of Boulevard and Carosse, and Mr. Pry must immediately come again to Paris, to talk technicals . . . Three days before Christmas Pry went, and talked at great length with the representatives of the Ancient Anonymous Society Caubec, who were a great improvement on Boulevard and Carosse, being a small firm with one real factory in Loire, making ropes. Unfortunately feeding stuffs for animals were not exactly in their direct line of business, but they were anxious to extend, and they were even prepared to incur a certain, clearly defined and limited risk to secure the agency. By Christmas Eve they had heard all they wanted to hear about 'SUNSAP', and desired only to be left alone to think it over. And Pry said to Kosoff:

'Is there any particular reason why I shouldn't go home now, and spend Christmas Day with my family?'

Somehow he never in fact thought of Mary and Michael as a family, and he never, if he could by any means avoid it, spend Christmas at home. But it seemed an unexceptionally right thing to say, the sort of thing he had noticed, that business men always did say, and a good reason for getting away from the monotony of Kosoff's voice and from Paris, which he did not like. Kosoff's answer surprised him; it always surprised him when Kosoff, seemingly lost in the clouds of company promotion, crawled out, quick as a ferret, to bite at the truth about people.

'Please, it does not matter. For you all days are the

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same. What is Christmas? Your wife says: "Christmas, of course it is terrible you do not come home"; but you, you say, "of course"; there is no "of course", other peoples all have nice Christmas, but you — you do not like, you stay away. Some other time, when other peoples must work, then you have Christmas, only you do not call it. Is it not so?"

Pry regarded Kosoff quizzically. 'I notice you have come home to your family, Mr. Kosoff, perhaps that just happened . . .'

'No, it have not happened, I have all arranged, long time. My wife likes, and I will she shall have pleasure, I am pleased she shall have pleasure. But you like best to say "No". To-morrow, if I did not ask, you would work; because I ask, you would go home. So you stay, and in morning we talk business, then with us you will have dinner, and to-morrow evening you go home. Am I not right, always good philosoph?'

'Pretty good,' said Pry. 'I'll stay.'

With a delicious feeling of having for once been found out, Pry went off to Montmartre, where he celebrated *Noël* in one of the cheapest restaurants, dancing round tables, throwing paper streamers and pulling crackers with the peasant-like and utterly respectable French families whom he found to his surprise frequenting that reputed haunt of vice.

In the morning there was a little, entirely unnecessary talk about the business, in a *café* over glasses of vermouth with Mr. Kosoff, and later Pry was presented to Madame Kosoff at their home. She was very charming and sat in a high-backed stall chair, like a

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throne, all gilt and red damask. Not only charming but amiable, and a sensible mother of the children, of whom there were three. As Kosoff darted off, time after time, to scream excitedly into the telephone, in one mutilated language after another, about schemes, propositions, propositions and more schemes, Madame Kosoff shook her head. He would never rest; to-morrow, that night perhaps, he would be off again, to Berlin or Zurich or Warsaw. . . .

Mr. Kosoff, his arm about his wife's shoulder, said, 'Your wife, Mrs. Pry, she also is beautiful, yes?'

'Ah, no, not specially, but she has character. She is very sensible, and nearly always right.'

Kosoff and Madame discussed this. ' . . . the English, you see, are peculiar, they like what it is they call character, one time you will come to England and you will see. Sometimes they have nice complexions, but ah, they are not beautiful, the English women. So rare is beautiful women in England . . . '

'She's not so damned ugly as all that,' said Pry.

The turkey, stuffed with chestnuts, was cooked in a French way, which eliminated the smell and the greasiness; and it was followed by ices and bon-bons, and delicately fragrant coffee, with pleasant friendly conversation, in which Kosoff never once raised his voice, never gesticulated, displaying only a lively and affectionate humour. Mademoiselle Cobra came in during the afternoon, kissed her sister very tenderly, brought presents for the children and played Chopin without virtuosity on the gilded piano. Pry was privileged to see the actor at home.

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It set Pry aglow with pleasurable sentiments, which lasted that evening until at midnight he stood on the wet and deserted deck of s.s. *Rouen*, in Dieppe Harbour. Then the glow evaporated, and once more in some mystical contact with the sea, he was alone, with a sense of access to the core of life, the firm ground, from which all experience, all desires, seem but swirling illusions. The housefronts of Dieppe across the water were half romantic — all scenes were like that for him nowadays, things half realized, paintings that promised something that never came through the paint. He gazed down at the water, it was oily and had a greenish sheen. Bits of stick and an unravelled basket floated half submerged. He prowled about; the s.s. *Rouen*, an old boat, torpedoed in the war, all red, wet iron — no sister ship this of the *Côte d'Azur*. The railway sidings and platforms looked wet and black with steely gleams, and over all, a rancid smell of urine. He watched the crane at work, and the shunting of trucks on the quay; they must have looked like that in the darkened nights of the war.

Pry was conscious only of the immediate present; he felt himself free; 'SUNSAP', Food from the Air, did not really matter. A hundred other things, he thought, would have done as well. 'SUNSAP' was only a lever with which to open a way into life. He remembered, once when he was unemployed, he had gone to Billingsgate Market, and seeing the porters, had desired of all things that he too had a box of fish to carry. Now 'SUNSAP' was his adequate box of fish, with it he could enter the bustle, the toil, the grim companionship of

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human society; without it he would again be a stranger, no more than a mere looker-on. But the will to proselytize food from the air, was, it then seemed to him, a thing grasped, clutched in his urgent human need, but something from which it was still possible to stand detached — that could be contemplated.

There was a hole in the sole of his left shoe. He felt the water on his sock, half warm, half wet. His being seemed somehow to be focused there, in his foot. If he had other shoes he would not put them on: he was not troubled because his foot was wet, he did not care; but with naïve amazement he reflected that the whole hour of midnight at Dieppe Maritime on that Christmas Day swung round a hole in his shoe.

## ‘SUNSAP’ BREAKS THROUGH

MR. SILAS GRABALL, Managing Director and Proprietor of Graball, Sons & Co. Ltd., of Dimchester, was regarded in the seed, corn, and feeding stuffs trade as a ‘game old cock’. He used the editorial or royal ‘we’ in all his letters, when he meant himself, and was very fond of litigation. For this reason he headed fully one half of his communications ‘Without Prejudice’ and ended them ‘Dictated by Mr. Silas Graball but not seen by him since’. Nobody was more scared of litigation when it came to the point of a writ, but nobody, within fifty miles of Dimchester, managed to get more threats, pistol-to-your-head demands and incorrect law into his business correspondence than Mr. Silas Graball. Starting with a tiny grocer’s shop in Dimchester, he had, in the course of some thirty years, built up a comfortable business with farmers. He sold stock-fattening specialities, ‘Graball’s Farmers’ Aids’, not only around Dimchester, but in several districts outside the county, and he even did a little export business. He had a machine for mixing meals and chicken feeds installed in a shed, which he called his factory. And in everything that touched his dignity as a wholesale and export merchant and general manufacturer, Mr. Silas Graball was on the defensive. He blew out his chest, crowed loudly on his heaps of chicken feed, and threatened all and sundry with the perils of the law.

## 'SUNSAP' BREAKS THROUGH

The Board of Hydro-Mechanical Constructions Ltd. was impressed, and anxiously referred all his long, vaguely threatening letters to the Company's solicitors, Messrs. Hagstone, Brown & Bog. Only Mr. Leary complained of 'the egotism of the man' and took an exception to him on moral grounds. Mr. Silas Graball still held the exclusive selling rights for 'SUNSAP' over the entire British Empire, and now that 'SUNSAP' was ready to be put on the market, he was not going to relinquish one jot or tittle of the rights, privileges, discounts, commissions, expenses and sundry fees which his solicitor, who had of course prepared the agreement, had most cannily provided for. He demanded his full legal rights.

The Board, prodded into activity by Mr. Pry, who had in this matter the very willing assistance of Mr. Leary, invited Mr. Graball to be reasonable; had him up again and again at Board meetings; asked him to let bygones be bygones; showed him that if he got everything to which he might by strict interpretation of the agreement be entitled it would just double the cost of 'SUNSAP' and no one could afford to buy it. And when that failed they threatened him with an action to set aside the agreement on grounds of non-performance, he having undertaken to advise the Company both technically and commercially, and never having done so. He took this last as an attack on his competence in the self-elected role of an expert on feeding stuffs, gathered up his papers, and, his solicitor trailing behind him, indignantly left the meeting. The next day he sent a letter, running to four pages of foolscap,

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setting forth remarks in his previous correspondence, which, he was advised, constituted 'Advice' within the meaning of Clause 5, and threatened actions for libel, slander, malfeasance, *lèse-majesté*, and general injury to his reputation and trade. He concluded with a demand that the fees and commissions then owing to him (amounting to some two thousand five hundred pounds) should be paid, and the agency given full operative effect, within fourteen days, failing which he would instruct his legal representatives.

In this impasse, Mr. Leary persuaded the Board, as a counsel of despair, that they should let Mr. Pry tackle Mr. Graball and see what he could do with him. Armed with a letter holding the legal issue in abeyance for a day or two and recommending a talk with Mr. Pry in their 'mutual' interests, Pry went to Dimchester.

He led the conversation round to Mr. Graball in the saloon bar of the Bell on the evening of his arrival, and later took a moonlight walk around the Graball business premises. They were down by the station, and included a small coal-depot. Pry saw the shed, which would be the 'factory' referred to in correspondence, and peered into the windows of the 'Registered Office', sizing it up. In the morning he presented himself before Mr. Silas Graball, a comfortably barrel-gutted gentleman, who carried his fine grey locks with something of an air.

'Ah, there you are, my boy,' said Mr. Graball. 'I have wanted to have a little talk with you about our synthetics, we must see if we can't put our heads

## ‘SUNSAP’ BREAKS THROUGH

together; now what’ll you have? Just a nip and a splash. No, no, don’t refuse, I always have one about this time, when you get to my age — the stomach you know — not what it used to be, doctor’s orders . . .’

Pry watched him pour out the whisky. Since Pry had discovered that a capacity for absorbing ethyl alcohol is one of the principal qualifications demanded of a business man, he had made a few experiments on himself. With absolute alcohol ‘borrowed’ from the laboratory, and an accurate burette, he had determined the amount, in cubic centimetres, that he could stand in varying digestive circumstances, what his limit was, and the narcotic effect of different doses. The experiments had been made at home in the evening, but he had no doubt that they held, approximately, for ten o’clock in the morning. He noted that the portion Mr. Graball poured for him was equivalent to fifteen cubic centimetres of the pure drug, and drank to their better understanding.

‘Ah,’ said Mr. Graball, ‘that’s better, much better. Now we can talk business. How do you like my little conservatoire? “My den”, I call it. You see, the old lion in his den . . .’ He stood up and extended his podgy hands.

Pry had already observed it; and found it sufficiently remarkable: it was a large room with white walls, with no windows, but a north light in the high ceiling, from which the light was then falling, mostly, on a magnificent parlour organ — it was something more than a harmonium — which, with its stool, stood at the centre of the opposite whitened wall.

## SUGAR IN THE AIR

'I see you are a musician,' said Pry, 'as well as a man of business.'

'Ah, business, my boy. I don't care about business; do you think I do it to make profits, no, when you are as old as I am you will understand. I am only in business for the fun of it; gives the old dog quite a kick still; but listen to this . . .' He gripped Pry's arm, and went over to the harmonium, which he pumped up and then caused to emit a succession of chords. The sound reverberated in the bare lofty room.

'A very fine instrument, nice tone . . .' said Pry, as the sound rolled away.

'Built for me, my own design . . . Excuse me . . . my private secretary.' He nodded towards a rosy-faced girl who had just entered the room. 'Yes? Miss Crump . . . ?'

'Mr. Rowlocks is on the phone, wants to speak to you about oil-cake, shall I put him through?'

It was reassuring to know that Mr. Graball was not in business for profit, and that he did not really care about the extra fourpence a hundredweight for the oil-cake; to hear him, in dignified remonstrance at the telephone about it, might have left Mr. Pry with a different impression. Mr. Graball sold fifteen hundredweight of the oil-cake, and had in Miss Crump again to take a letter, informing the customer that the stuff had been sold to him, which somehow made it legal, and not to be wriggled out of.

'Let me see now, where were we? Yes, of course, we can't think of giving up our over-riding commission. The labourer is worthy of his hire.'

## 'SUNSAP' BREAKS THROUGH

Mr. Graball's readily assumed expression of virtuous indignation was marred by the behaviour of his eyes; these went glassy and stared proudly from side to side, never coming to rest in the direction of the observer. A symptom of chronic alcoholism, thought Pry, unsympathetically.

'I think,' said Pry amiably, 'you are a humbugging old sprucer.'

Mr. Graball was very pleased. Pry had already found out that middle-aged men in business were nearly always pathetically starving for affection and they loved that sort of thing. Graball pointed a fat thumb to the ceiling, looked for all the world like a professor of voice production showing a dumb-struck soprano the general direction of top C, and said:

'I, a humbug, you dare to come here, in my own castle, and say that to me. In business, my boy, never wear your heart on your sleeve. We must have another little drink....'

'Now, Mr. Graball, you're standing plump in the way, you're stopping my little curly headed 'SUNSAP' from running out to play. What are you going to do about it?'

'Your Board ... we have already put our rights before your Board.'

'I'm not interested in your squabbles with our Board, it's my invention you are bottling up, mine and Dr. Zaareb's. You are a public spirited man, Mr. Graball, and you are not going to let such discoveries as ours go phut, because of any petty personal considerations.'

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'We have a contract . . .' Mr. Graball began to stride about the room and Pry pursued him.

'I know you've got a contract. It's a damn funny contract — the daftest contract you've ever found anybody mugs enough to sign: but if you hold out on it you know you won't get a penny, you won't sell "SUNSAP" either, and even Mogley Bros., in this town, will get the laugh on you. They'll point you out in the street as the man who lost his chance to sell "SUNSAP," the opportunity of a lifetime, the first food from the air . . .'

'Of course we manufacturers understand each other. . . . We have never been unreasonable . . . our rights . . . but you and I are both artists, my boy; I can talk business with you.' He did a peculiar trick with his fingers, which Pry assumed to be some sort of Masonic test.

'No,' said Pry, 'I'm not, can't afford it.'

'Pity, but you must come to our Lodge,' he patted Pry on the shoulder. 'You're all right, I like you,' and slipping down on to the harmonium stool, he began to play a hymn tune. The music was in manuscript and apparently his own setting for the old hymn.

It was Mr. Graball's turn to be surprised, when at the second verse, Pry joined in, and sang the words in a confident, powerful and not at all a badly trained voice. But this outburst surprised Pry, almost as much as it surprised Graball and his clerks in the outer office. Pry had learned to play on this voice, as on a trumpet, during his adolescence — a trumpet before which the walls of Jericho would fall. It was within its limitations a glorious voice, and when Pry did sing nobody questioned

his right, but he very, very rarely did, except for his own enjoyment between his own four walls. He had not the courage and the world had no use for a singing voice — he had never met the right kind of people — nobody wanted him to sing, unless he took a bold and daring initiative and just started up. But as time went on he had come to care less and less for other people, and was more disposed to curse them than to sing to them. The social atmosphere of post-war England had no place for singing, it was frozen out, except as a form of super exhibitionism, a part of the beastly entertainment industry, or something to be indulged in by groups of tolerated cranks, operatic societies and church choirs. To Pry it seemed that singing should be a normal part of life, like laughing or swearing, and if it could not be that there should be no song at all.

That Mr. Graball should have a harmonium in his office, and that he should play it when he felt inclined, did not appear to Mr. Pry in the least ridiculous: it surprised him, startled him out of his repressions, for the opposite reason, because it was so unusually intelligent and sane. The business belonged to old Graball, the staff were half of them members of his family: why shouldn't he play a harmonium during business hours, and compose hymn tunes, if he wanted to? That he had the independence and the enterprise to do so, meant that there was something pretty solid in Mr. Graball, for all his litigiousness, cross-eyed indignation and royal egotism. He was not just an old fool, but someone who had seriously to be reckoned with.

Silas Graball shook hands with Mr. Pry, clenched his

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hand in both of his own, and when they had begun over again and done all the six verses of the hymn, could scarcely make enough fuss of him: showed him the granary, the counting house, the 'factory', and the coal-depot, and took him to his home for lunch with the family. 'How do you like,' he said, 'my comfortable little business, ten thousand pounds turnover last year, and growing a little each year, not so bad . . .?' For nearly two and a half hours Mr. Graball was both truthful and reasonable, and even agreed that though the association of 'SUNSAP' with the name of Graball for the export trade was an incalculable advantage, the appointment of some other agents for the more outlying portions of the Empire might be advisable, and that thirty-five per cent commission for the sale of an inexpensive feeding stuff was perhaps a shade on the high side.

Before evening Pry had wheedled out of him his verbal agreement to reduce his fee as commercial and technical adviser to a sum nearly as nominal as his duties; to reduce his selling discount from thirty-five to twenty-five per cent, and to do what he could to get 'SUNSAP' going in England, leaving Mr. Pry to appoint other agents for Scotland, Ireland and Overseas, provided that he got five per cent over-riding commission on their sales. Also if Mr. Pry should know of any good people for selling 'SUNSAP' or wanted to make direct sales, even in England, he wouldn't mind so long as he got ten per cent and it was not too near Dimchester.

The terms were still exorbitant, but once they were legally confirmed, Graball Sons & Co. would no longer

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have a stranglehold, they would get a rake-off for which they had done nothing; but it would be possible to go ahead and sell. On the basis of the new terms it was possible to settle the prices at which 'SUNSAP' should be sold, to draw up the price list which Pry was waiting to incorporate in the literature. Pry left Dimchester in a hurry before Mr. Silas Graball had time to come to himself and change his mind. But on his way to the station, he called in the post-office and sent a premature, and unnecessary, telegram to Zaareb:

DRIVEN COACH & HORSES THROUGH GRABALL AGREEMENT SALES BEGIN PRY.

The Board would have taken less notice of the version of his conference with Mr. Graball which Pry saw fit to put in his report, had it not been for one fortuitous circumstance. The Coda, having disclosed all the information they had been given about the processes to the A.G.N. in Germany and the Kougelhof cabal in France, under their patent and process pool arrangements, had written a brief letter to the Board, saying they regretted they were not interested in the business. That was all, and with these few lines of typescript before them, the whole beautiful castle in the air which the Board had been building on the conviction that they were soon going to sell everything to the Coda, just vanished. There was nothing left for them to do but carry on. Now this development with Graball's was a new raft, something upon which their hopes could begin building again. 'On Continent,' said Mr. Kosoff, 'is international situations, everywhere is crises, on Continent we can nothing do, most important

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is the home trade, now must we do business, all business with our Empire . . . you do not know how great is British Empire. Graball's will everything sell and finish.'

The Board did not go all the way with Mr. Kosoff, but they went far enough to be very much disturbed when they received Mr. Graball's next letter. He referred to the 'conference' with Mr. Pry, complimented that gentleman on his attempt to talk him round, but maintained that everything said at the conference was 'without prejudice' and purely hypothetical. He must insist on his full legal rights. Unless within fourteen days . . .

'What, gentlemen, are we going to do next?' inquired the bland Lord Lambsbottam. 'I feel that in this matter we should have the advice of the Company's solicitors and the Preference Shareholders' Committee; it has become a matter of some importance. . . .'

'Let me have another go at him, while he's still warm,' suggested Mr. Pry.

Furnished with a flattering letter to Mr. Graball, which thanked him for a number of imaginary favours, and which appointed Mr. Pry Minister Plenipotentiary of the Board, with full diplomatic honours, Pry met Graball again, this time at his Club, the Crochet & Quaver, in St. Jezebel's Square. By a stroke of luck, Mr. Graball was again in a good mood, having pulled off a paying deal in a certain proprietary cow-drench that morning. Pry came in for the celebration, which by half-past four had already run to four double Scotches. Pry put the stuff down carefully, not more

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than two cubic centimetres at a time, as he had practised doing it at home with the burette, and with the aid of a lot of tea cake, to act as absorbent, he knew himself good for two more, without losing his senses or the fine thread of persuasion. Mr. Graball, for all the immunity conferred by habitual indulgence, had had a long start, was less scientific, and at a disadvantage. Pry won.

He simplified the issue by showing Mr. Graball that only two figures need be altered in the agreement, and one word 'Inclusive' changed to 'Exclusive'. He worked Mr. Graball up into a boozed frenzy to begin selling food from the air, got the idea insinuated into the unnarcotized part of his consciousness, put before him a short letter, ready typed, which was all he need sign. He was not drunk enough to do that, but in a day or two, strangely enough, he did give in. He accepted the proposed changes, without seeing quite all that they implied, and made only one or two minor reservations, which the solicitors haggled over at length but which were of no importance in practice.

Encouraged by this success and by the compliments of the Board, who sent him a first instalment of fifty pounds out of the five hundred they had promised, and reminded him that by the terms of his contract he would be made a Director if he sold fifteen hundred tons of 'SUNSAP' at a profit that year, Pry worked day and night and polished off the literature.

It extolled to the skies the new product of scientific research, the pure, rich, fertility-promoting essence of sunshine and fresh air; gave the 'SUNSAP' rations for the

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improvement and quick economical fattening of all kinds of farm stock; contained a mass of novel and interesting information about mineral requirements, vitamins and balanced feeds, with a table of the seventeen three-starred advantages of 'SUNSAP'; was enlivened with a wealth of diagrams, of which that of the cow dissolving its own skeleton was but one; and ended with a list of prices and packings, and a photograph of a rural scene, forty miles from East Bullock, 'Where "SUNSAP" is Made'.

Line by line, and page by page, Pry pasted up the matter in dummy booklets and folders, making the number of words fit the spaces left by the illustrations, settling the kind of type for the cross-headings and the amount of second colour work to liven up the covers, and yet leave them simple and dignified. Every bit of it he would do with his own hands, the compositors had only to set each page exactly as they were told. And at last the completed 'copy' was sent to the printers, 'vetted' by Miss Theta in the parts about animals, 'vetted' by Dr. Zaareb for general accuracy, syntax and style, and baptized with its author's tears of relief and pride: the poem of 'Food from the Air'.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### FULL AHEAD

THE first result of sending out the 'literature' was to interest the Press. The Press, from the most self-important of the penny dailies to the least self-respecting of the twopenny weeklies, was unanimous in desiring to tell its readers the good news of 'Food from the Air'. They would like to feature the story; they would esteem it a favour if their reporters might have a few further particulars, some photographs, a few personalities; nothing would be published of which the Company did not approve. There was but one small formality, they would insist that the Company must first, in its own interest, take advantage of their advertising columns as their principal media of publicity and sign the enclosed reservation for space on the dotted line.

Pry listened patiently to the first two of the space salesmen — they called themselves reporters — who followed pronto on the heels of these letters. For the third and all subsequent Press representatives he was prepared and got in first by saying:

'Good morning. You are from the *Daily Circular*. I can't waste time. How many column inches of advertisement do *you* want, per half-column editorial write-up?'

With the *Daily Circular*, which had a circulation of one million, several hundred thousand, the rate, after

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a lot of fencing and bluff, worked out at about three quarters of a column for every two full pages of advertisement. With the *Pork Fattener's Weekly* it was about the same, but then their space did not cost one-fiftieth as much.

Determined not to be bludgeoned into doing any Press advertising until the time was ripe for it, Pry turned down the lot, and not a single reference to the successful synthesis of food from the air appeared as an item of news in any English newspaper. Of the technical journals, some mentioned the literature, in an odd corner, under Catalogues Received, and that was all.

But as the weeks went on, into February, there was a small but steadily growing response to the issue of the booklets, from farmers, people who wanted district agencies, officers of the Ministry of Food, and food manufacturers. Every morning Pry had a score or more of letters to answer, and the lab boy was kept busy sending out tins of 'SUNSAP' as free samples. In the dictation of sales letters Pry grew slick, and all day long Miss Rosewood pounded them out. Most of it was like grinding words out of a machine, but there were some letters which caused Pry to stop and think. They were for the most part from farmers, the modern kind of farmers, alert and on the watch for every advance in technology which touches their business, shrewd, well-educated men, with no mean scientific knowledge. To engage in correspondence with such men was a delight to Mr. Pry.

During the month of February fifteen tons of 'SUNSAP' were sold.

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'Pretty good!' said Dr. Zaareb, who came out to the works regularly every Wednesday and sat opposite Pry, in Ackworth's old chair — Ackworth having been persuaded to take up his quarters in Cocaine's old laboratory now that Pry had so much commercial work to do. Zaareb read the correspondence as an onlooker and a friend. He was retained as a synthetic chemist and doggedly refused to assume any responsibility outside that function, but, except where his own interests were concerned, he was the shrewdest of business men. He listened with a queer expression to Pry dictating to Miss Rosewood, and plugged off into the laboratory, where the attempts to condense sugar into starch presented difficulties worthy of even Zaareb's mind.

'How much do these things cost?' asked Zaareb, one morning, turning over a new pile of the booklets that happened to be on the desk, 'you did tell me . . .'

'The brochures? Five pounds a thousand.'

'*Brochures*, why do you persist in using words you can't pronounce. *Pamphlet* is a perfectly good English word. But I am not concerned to point out the gaps in your education. There is something more I was going to say: couldn't you afford to send one of these to each of the Company's shareholders? Let them have something a little less depressing than the Annual Report.'

Pry put the suggestion to the Board and the 'pamphlets' were sent. The Company's Register of Shareholders was lent to Mr. Pry for the purpose of getting the envelopes addressed, and immediately afterwards Mr. Cloacher sent Mrs. Block to retrieve it, saying Mr.

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Cloacher was very particular that it should not be put to any unauthorized use. Which was entirely characteristic, since Pry or anybody else could see it at any time, by paying a shilling at Somerset House.

Some of the shareholders wanted to know why Hydro-Mechanical Constructions Ltd., who were supposed to be building houses, should now be selling pig food; but on the whole they supposed it was all right and they were very much encouraged. The quotation for H.M.C. Ordinaries rose from three farthings to a penny-farthing on the Stock Exchange.

Some of the gloom and depression which had hung over the Company for two and a half years began to lift. The Directors congratulated each other, and gave the clearest instructions to Mr. Cloacher not to offend Mr. Pry or interfere in any way with his operations. Mr. Cloacher only managed to get the accounts under his control; he did it by sidling up to General Thump. Pry watched the process in operation, apprehensively, for he had good reason to distrust everything Cloacher saw fit to do; but on the whole he decided he didn't mind. He hated accounts, begrudged the time spent on them, and so long as he fixed the price he did not care much who sent out the invoices: 'Let others count the pickings, I catch the birds.'

In the month of March they sold forty-seven tons.

With the lengthening days and the sun past the equinox the new plant entered into very nearly full production, building up stocks. Research in the laboratory ceased, everybody was working on production, the making of 'SUNSAP' became a routine. But in

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preparing the literature there was one point that Pry had glossed over: the difficulty of feeding liquid syrup to cattle. Now some of the farmers wanted 'SUNSAP' in the form of a cake, absorbed in bran and compressed. Leave it until next year, said the Board. No, said Pry. He went to see the people who had supplied the sawdust for the breakfast food when he was in Durham; worked out a mixture of treated sawdust and beaten paper at one half the cost of bran. Found it would do. Found a firm who had for sale a second-hand mixing machine, that would mash it up with 'SUNSAP'. Found another firm who had a hydraulic press that would force it into cakes. By the end of April he had twenty tons of 'SUNSAP' feed cake made — called it, in a moment of inspiration, 'SUNSAP SUGAR CAKE'. Had twenty thousand leaflets about it printed, and sent them out.

In April they sold ninety-four tons of 'SUNSAP' and ten tons of cake. Things were looking up; everybody was working at high pressure, there was an exhilarating atmosphere of excitement. 'Steady,' said Dr. Zaareb. 'There are a lot of people who will try a new thing once. . . .' Pry's two per cent commission on the sales began to be significant: he got it at the end of every month. Cloacher, who got three per cent, looked on. His clerk, rate fixer and only traveller, goaded to fury by Mrs. Block's tongue, had left to open up a pre-cast concrete business of his own in East Bullock with half Mr. Cloacher's customers. Cloacher was powerless to divert the Board's interest from the dazzling progress of 'SUNSAP'; consumed with jealousy he turned viciously

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on Mrs. Block. Mrs. Block locked herself in the works kitchen and prayed for him, *aloud*.

In May they sold a hundred and fifty tons of the syrup and the cake, in June nearly three hundred tons. They had sold all their stocks and reached the productive limit of the plant. With daylight lamps, running on electricity from the power station, and working all night they increased the rate of production by fifty tons a month; they could do no more. By day, day after day, the sun blazed down, favouring them with the maximum solar energy. It was the most magnificent June for seven years.

To Pry it seemed sometimes that all this had happened in a flash, sprung up overnight; at other times that six years of his life had been crowded into as many months. For these orders had not fallen out of the blue, they had been got by talk. From the moment that he started on the literature, back at Christmas time, it had seemed that he had not for one moment ceased to talk; explaining, proclaiming, persuading — into the ten thousand times amplifying printing presses, into the advertisement 'copy' — for he now advertised by the page and the half page in the technical journals — into the dictated replies to thousands of inquiries, into the greedy ears of agents and the slow ears of travellers. With his first fifty pounds, in January, he had bought a small second-hand car, in it he had dashed about the country, offering people who sold feedstuffs their fifteen per cent commission, if they would get their travellers on the road and work their districts with 'SUNSAF'. He had been to Scotland, and broken bread

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with some half-dozen of the influential farmers: given them a discount too, through their co-operative societies. Solid, but enterprising, the Scottish farmers had bought a little, a very little at first, they had found it good, and they told their neighbours and their friends; the news of 'SUNSAP' ran by word of mouth more quickly into every farm in Scotland, than any Press advertising could have carried it. Silas Graball too had roused himself, with the glory of a sole wholesale distributing agent — at least in name — he had sold altogether some fifty or sixty tons. But it was from Ireland that the real help had come.

Way back in the early days of March, when the daffodils were in bloom in the broad valley of the Shannon, Pry had yielded to the importunities of Mr. Buck Reilly, who represented that in all Ireland there was no one better able to sell 'SUNSAP' than he, Buck Reilly himself, and he had gone to Athlone. From the moment that Buck Reilly had met him on the platform at Athlone station things had moved at speed, and still after four months the 'Irish problem' showed no signs of slowing down. Buck Reilly had shaken Pry's hand with one muscular wrench, hurried him into a powerful car, and hurtled him at seventy miles an hour through flying hedgerows, chickens, pigs and terrified countrymen, to Aun House on the banks of Lough Ree. With a magnificent swerve he had brought the car to rest on the lawn before the ancient and unpainted mansion, and before Pry had time to recover his breath had dragged him through blackthorn hedges and over plank bridges to see his private aeroplane, then standing

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in a little field from which one would have thought it impossible for any aircraft to rise. Mrs. Reilly, who was camping in a bell tent beside the aeroplane, absolutely refused to allow an ascent to be made before lunch. 'No, dear,' she said, 'Mr. Pry is tired, take him back to the house *at once* and give him some lunch; what are you thinking of?' With a grateful smile at Mrs. Reilly, Pry followed the disappointed and somewhat sobered Buck Reilly back to the house.

In the dilapidated, wide-windowed dining-room, there was a great carven table of black oak, set with old silver and sparkling glass. All sorts of people were in the house, they came and went, held up the eating with challenging and witty talk; about Mrs. McQuinn who was having the law on her neighbour over a matter of trespass by cows; about sending a boy to the village to buy petrol for the aeroplane; about the prospects of universal peace by the early establishment of an Anglo-Irish World Empire; and about the potatoes, the Golden Wonders, grown after barley, that one got up from the table and picked with one's fingers out of a big pot by the fire. 'Break it with your hands, man,' said Buck Reilly. 'Put a nut of butter in it. . . .'

After lunch Buck Reilly said what he wanted: he wanted, and he intended to get, the agency for 'SUNSAP' in Ireland, both the South and the North. He wanted 'SUNSAP' packed in gallon tins; only one sized tin, of a queer shape, that every pig owner in Ireland would get to know as well as a bottle of Guinness. When he got the agency he'd sell millions of them. But everything had got to be cut and dried, no humming and hawing

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and perhapses about what the stuff would do. The literature was all right but it was all too fussy and scientific for the Irishman who only wanted to know what it did to pigs. 'You've no confidence in your own stuff,' said Buck Reilly. 'I'm going to teach you how to sell it.' He began bashing an imaginary punch ball: '“SUNSAP”—big letters—One! PUTS ON WEIGHT. Two! BRINGS BIG LITTERS. Three! BUILDS HEFTY BONES. . . .'

'Gently,' said Pry, 'it's bacon they want, not hefty bones.'

'You write it out. I'm no scholar, I'm just showing you. . . .'

Somewhat timidly Pry insinuated enquiries about Buck Reilly's qualifications as an agent for pig food; had he a business in feeding stuffs, an office, a warehouse, any kind of selling organization. . . .?

Mr. Buck Reilly swept all that aside. He hadn't an office, and he hadn't a warehouse: all he'd got was an aeroplane and a bell tent. Aun House didn't belong to him, he'd borrowed it from a relative, to entertain the representative of the London Company. Mr. Pry could put that in his pipe and choke himself with it; but that wasn't the point. Did he want to sell the damned stuff in Ireland, or didn't he?

'My Board of Directors . . . ' began Mr. Pry.

'If your Board of Directors get an order from me for two hundred tons of "SUNSAP", cash down, what more do they want?'

'Well, of course, that would influence them . . . '

'Influence them! They'd kiss me on both cheeks . . . '

It seemed wise to let things cool off a little, and just

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get the 'hang' of Buck Reilly. Not that he mightn't buy two hundred tons — anything can happen in Ireland. There was an ebonite panel on the wall on which a green light had just lit up. 'What on earth's that?' asked Pry.

Buck Reilly led off on an eager exploration of the entire house, going from room to room chasing it up. There was a private wireless receiving and transmitting station in the pantry, connected to loudspeakers and signalling gadgets all over the house. When the Athlone station began to broadcast the green lamps lit up; when BJPM down in County Kerry, which belonged to another relative, started, the red lights glowed. The yellow lights were only Paris.

'I suppose,' said Pry, 'you have wireless on your plane and this station sends you the weather reports and tells you when dinner is ready.'

It had not yet come to that, but it was an unfortunate remark, for it reminded Buck Reilly about his plane. He had only had it for a fortnight and he was far too much of a boy to leave it alone for very long. It was a fine day, the petrol had come from the village, and Mr. Pry must go up with him for a little spin over the country.

The word 'spin' sounded very ominous to Mr. Pry, but he felt he wouldn't get far with Buck Reilly if he hadn't the pluck to go up with him in the plane. Sustained by the thought that he was, in truth, risking his life for 'SUNSAP', Pry went up.

The plane missed the top of the hedge by just over six inches and in thirty seconds was rising over the

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lough. Buck Reilly had said it was not necessary to be strapped in, but on that Pry had insisted, and he gripped the bar in front of him anxiously. It was the first time he had ever been up in an aeroplane and it astonished him that there was nothing in the least aerial about his sensations; he was not gliding or floating on wings, but sitting hard in a rigid contrivance that was acted upon by equally inflexible mechanical forces. The machine turned stiffly in a short radius and tilted some thirty degrees, causing a sick feeling in Pry's bowels. He grasped the bar more and more tightly, throwing his weight against the tilt, as though it were possible so to reduce it. He earnestly tried to convince his neural organization that the tilt would probably not continue to the point of tipping him out, but it was one of those occasions when the body refuses to be influenced by the processes of the mind, and Pry was unable to look over the side for sheer funk. When the machine levelled up and was going straight again Pry dragged his head into a position in which he could just look over, and gaining confidence gazed in fascination at the ruled prettiness of the fields and the bug-like appearance of motor cars on the roads beneath. The wings of the plane looked exactly as they did when it was on the ground and he thought: I could quite easily step out on to them. At that his whole nervous system took fright and vertigo, and he dared not think it again.

The next time he looked out they were over a cemetery, it appeared about a quarter of an inch square, but with the gravestones each separate and clearly

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defined. Death, he thought, would not be so bad if one were only as small as that; perhaps one *is* as small as that, and Life, by the time we come to leave it, just so very little a thing. . . .

They went on over Galway, presently to turn north again over Roscommon. Pry lost much of his apprehension, and when at last they began to circle down his body was quite brave with relief — at the time of greatest danger. The shadow of the plane moved over the fields like a dim moth on tapestry, and in a moment they were down, bumping over the rough grass and pulling up by the hedge with two feet to spare. The risk had not materialized and Pry could study the parts of the machine without feeling involved, satisfying his curiosity. There was something special about the undercarriage, Buck Reilly had had it made specially for him, for landing and taking off from restricted spaces.

That evening they discussed 'SUNSAP'; by midnight the hearthplace was littered with the stubs of Sweet Afton cigarettes and at two in the morning Northern Ireland still remained the stumbling block. If he, Buck Reilly, would place an order for two hundred tons of 'SUNSAP', cash with order, he should have the agency for the Free State, but not for Northern Ireland. All or nothing, said Reilly, he must have Northern Ireland. No, said Pry.

'You're making a damned lot of fuss about the six counties, what does it matter to you or anybody else *who* has them?'

'They constitute a separate territory in our selling

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organization,' said Pry with finality. As their selling organization was almost non-existent and a pure matter of opportunism, the invention struck Pry as rather choice. He was pleased with it. After all, there was no reason why a Limited Company with three million pounds capital should not be presumed to have a selling organization.

'Then,' said Buck Reilly, 'I shall go directly to your Board and you'll hear what they have to say.'

'You do not know our Board . . .'

The important detail that Pry did not mention was that he had in his pocket a letter from James Cleggan & Co. of Antrim, Co. Antrim, who wanted the agency for the North. He saw a chance of playing off the North against the South, and convinced that a show of reluctance at accepting an order for even two hundred tons was good policy, he left Buck Reilly to his aeroplane and made his way, ostensibly back to London but in fact to County Antrim. He had plenty of time in Irish trains to think about Buck Reilly.

If what Buck Reilly said about himself was to be believed, he had gone to the States as a stowaway, via Jamaica, and during the Prohibition he had made a fortune in the drink trade; no, not as a bootlegger, but legitimately in the soft drink racket. He claimed that success in selling soft drinks to Americans was quite a good enough qualification for selling 'SUNSAP' to the Irish, and it did not sound, on the face of it, unreasonable.

CHAPTER XXV

WITH BANNERS FLYING

JAMES CLEGGAN was a personality in Northern Ireland, and was known in every public house, club room, and Government office in that nervously loyal part of the United Kingdom simply as 'Jimmy'. He had a word for everybody, enjoyed everything in life from soda bread to special commissions, was passing wealthy and a universal favourite. He used his popularity to persuade the merchants and agriculturists of the North that the measures introduced by the Northern Government, the marketing restrictions, the quotas and the taxes were all for their own especial good, and enjoyed in consequence all manner of privileges for his own business, which was the manufacture of a special kind of Irish linen, a speciality known only to the wealthy and the royal houses of Europe.

The linen business, which was small and run by a very capable manager, did not absorb a great deal of Jimmy's time, he looked after the social side of the selling and saw that every year or two they had something new for the summer jackets of Peers, but for the rest he had a hundred enthusiasms: the cultivation of new and strange varieties of dahlias, the promotion of hydroplane races over the loughs, the design of machines for cutting weeds under water to clear fishing preserves, and, lastly, pigs. By pulling strings with

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the Government he saw much money in the export of bacon pigs at a guaranteed price, and his taste for novelties caught on at once to the arrangement of O'Sullivan's labour-saving piggeries at Moyne. At the time of Pry's visit Jimmy's second pig house had just been completed and he was poring over charts in coloured pencil, showing day by day how much bacon he was getting per hundredweight of meal.

To sell 'Food from the Air' greatly appealed to Jimmy Cleggan; his enthusiasm, always passing through one enterprise and into another, was already moving from pigs to synthetic food, by a process that required no encouragement. Pry had no need to be a bagman, no need to use persuasion, and encouraged by the warmth of Jimmy's personality, just told his wonderful story of 'SUNSAP'. By tea-time Jimmy had made up his mind. He was going to have the agency for the North.

'It is not going to be easy to sell,' said Pry. 'You know that. It is nearly twice as dear as molasses; and farmers are conservative, it is not easy to make them change their methods.'

'They'll listen to me, and I don't care what the stuff costs — damme man, what do I care about losing a few thousand pounds?'

'Then there's Buck Reilly of Athlone, he wants the whole of Ireland, he is prepared to order at once an extra two hundred tons, if we give him the North. . . .'

'Two hundred tons, what's two hundred tons, I shall sell a thousand; if that's all you want I'll give you a cheque to-morrow — and if you don't take it, and you

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send any bloody Sinn Féiner up here trying to sell the stuff in Ulster, by God man, I'll hound him from the country.'

Two hundred plus two hundred, thought Pry, is four hundred; four hundred tons as good as sold; and all for a division of the territory — of the monopoly of exploiting the people of Ireland — not one whit more illogical than the existing political frontier.

That evening the amiable Jimmy Cleggan and the company assembled at his house amused themselves trying to make Pry drunk. The whisky was poured into thin, queer shaped, tinted glasses with a peculiar iridescence. Jimmy kept his eye on Pry's glass, taunted him to drink it up, replenished it again and again, saying 'It's rare Irish whisky, it has no harshness, and it leaves no headache in the morning, no headache at all'. Pry drank cautiously, judging the sensations of swimmingness that rose and slowly evaporated after each swig. He was determined to go on, defying them to make him drunk. Half-way through the fifth tumbler he stood up, and leant against the mantelpiece, where there were some intricate ivory carvings. Jimmy was proud of them and turned them around, they were fine pieces, old and very valuable. Then he took Pry all over the house to see the Chinese ironwood furniture, the sketches by Blampied, the oriental bronze snuffer sets, each supported by small black dogs, with their tails twisted. 'Look,' he said, 'how finely carved they are, even to the little testicles of the dogs!' They went into the pantry to see the glassware; and there took each another whisky. Pry forgave Jimmy every-

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thing, took hold of his coat and admired the material of which it was made. It was very thin, with a blue-green lustre and a hard surface. Fine Cleggan linen; upstairs he showed Pry all the suits in his wardrobe. By that time, for Pry, every object was aglow, like a still life painting of itself, so that he saw himself, life, and death streaming all its importance through Jimmy's wardrobe.

Back in the drawing-room again, with still more whisky, Pry talked of a world without trees. In time to come, he said, there would be no more crops, no more green leaves. All organic substances on earth save the bodies of living men would be burnt to provide Man's two primal needs: Power and Synthetic Food. The earth would revert to its appearance before Life began; every landscape a waste of barren rocks, marked only by the straight white roads and the dotting of white power stations and chemical factories, about which would cluster Man's future habitations. Slowly the synthetic food factories would withdraw all the carbon dioxide from the air — save for the plants in the window boxes, which would then be kept inside, to survive in the immediate neighbourhood of Man's exhaled breath — every plant would die, and with them every animal, every living organism, except Man and his immediate parasites and pets. For a while the sentimentalists of the future would keep preserves of plants and animals in enormous glass houses, with the air artificially enriched with gases spared from the manufacture of food, but in time even that would pass and then only Man, with his fleas and his lice and the

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viruses and bacilli of human disease, would remain of all the teeming flora and fauna of the world. With 'SUNSAP' there had arisen on earth the inconspicuous dawn of a new age; a new aeon of geological time. The animals and the plants, created by God for the convenience, pleasure and use of mankind, having served their purpose in the childhood of Man's invention, would pass away and Man would fulfil his destiny in an absolute mastery and exclusive ownership of the earth. The synthesis of sugar was accomplished, soon starch, then cellulose in all its forms, then proteins and the fats, all would be synthesized, compounded only of minerals, the sun's energy and the gases of the air. Wöhler had struck the first note of the death knell of all living things, when in 1828, thirty years before Darwin, he startled the world with his synthesis of urea; then had come Liebig, Louis Pasteur, Emil Fischer, Baly and Zaareb. Their names would live in glory. The Angels of Mercy, for the killing and the reaping and the slaughter would pass; save between nation and nation, man and man. Only through the self-extinction of mankind could the earth ever bear again its old confusion, diversity and waste of non-human life.

'If I wasn't on the water wagon, I'd be believing him myself,' said Jimmy, polishing off another double Jameson and filling Pry's glass, 'and phwat aboot Hitler and the Holy Mother Church . . . ?'

Steadily, taking a desperate chance, Pry drained his glass; he talked on and on. It was Jimmy who first reeled on a chair and confessed he could stand no more. The iridescent glasses stood empty on the floor, Pry saw

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them shining in an unearthly brilliance, their particular shapes sustained by the disciplined operation of the entire physical universe. The party broke up.

Pry dare not let his will relax until he had taken off his clothes and was already in bed. Then he succumbed as with a sudden crash, and slipped down and down into a chasm of nerve-illuminated darkness. He still believed that he had the power to stop the rush; but he let go. The bed fell faster and faster, ending in a confused and empty swirl, and then the rush was all the other way, a terrifying, sickening rush — a hell's extravaganza of the flight in Buck Reilly's aeroplane. Then a mammoth imagined hand pressed on his face; his nose, pip-like and exaggeratedly small, stuck through the enormous fingers, to breed a crop of excessively little things; thin sets of infants' fingernails all close together, without fingers. He saw the world out of which Aubrey Beardsley's drawings must have come: the womb of the shrivelled rat-like faces, the swollen extravagance of peacock plumage. Delicious danger, pleasure *in extremis*, voluptuousness engalled with the terrible knowledge that it might all go too far, that some vital filament might snap under the strain, with all black death afterwards through which to fall.

They woke him up at noon the next day, and Jimmy Cleggan met him at the foot of the stairs. Pry had stood the test: every sporting instinct in Jimmy's Irish nature went out to Pry, in friendliness and affection. The 'SUNSAP' agency was a deal, and that afternoon he handed to Pry a cheque on account for two hundred tons of 'SUNSAP' to be delivered in Belfast.

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But all that was back in March, and the Irish campaign which started off so well with these first two visits, had progressed in the months which followed through a series of rows. To begin with, Buck Reilly had come to London and stormed the Board to let him have the agency for the North. Then Cloacher, seeing that Mr. Pry had got an order for two hundred tons from both Cleggan and Reilly with such apparent ease, represented him to the Board as an obviously inexperienced and incompetent business man because he had not got more. Influenced by Cloacher to exploit up to the hilt the blind enthusiasm of both Buck Reilly and Jimmy Cleggan, the Board had forced both of them to buy three hundred tons before granting the agencies. The effect of this was to make both men buy much more than they had any reasonable expectation of selling while the stuff remained fresh, and to force them to make extravagant and ill-advised claims for 'SUNSAP' in an attempt to hurry sales. Cloacher also contrived, since people had been found who were willing to buy, to increase the price. With the result that Buck Reilly, who in addition to the increased price had to pay heavy import duties to the Free State Customs, resorted to the expedient of advising his customers that 'SUNSAP' was just twice as effective as it actually was; that one pound would do instead of two. Both Buck Reilly and Jimmy Cleggan had taken up their agencies; but with the utmost bad feeling towards Hydro-Mechanical Constructions (Great Britain) Ltd., and each other.

Both men had made a spectacular 'splash' with 'SUNSAP' in their respective territories, spent much

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more on publicity and travellers than they could ever get back in the year's trading, and by the end of June four hundred out of the first six hundred tons of 'SUNSAP' ever made had already been shipped to Dublin and Belfast.

During the month of July the plant was working day and night, the production of 'SUNSAP' was forced up to nearly two hundred and fifty tons a month, and at the end of the month only seventy tons remained unsold as stock in reserve. A new difficulty was looming ahead: in the winter, when green fodder and fresh food is scarce, the demand for synthetic food would tend to increase, but in the winter the days would be short and the light weak, and the photosynthetic efficiency of the plant would fall off, they would not be able to produce more than a hundred tons a month. It was imperatively necessary to accumulate stocks, the plant must be kept going at full blast. They could not afford to refuse orders during the winter, but more important than that, fifteen hundred tons of 'SUNSAP' had to be made as well as sold that year, if Pry was to get the Directorship that he had been promised. Anxiously and constantly he was counting the tons.

Keeping the plant going at full blast was in itself almost a *tour de force*. Strained to the limit of its capacity one part or another was for ever going wrong; there had been no time to perfect it in the light of experience, and the whole process was new. Pry told the Board he must have another maintenance fitter and they at once agreed, such details were beneath their notice. But Cloacher controlled the pay roll. With the Company

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in financial difficulty, he said, they couldn't afford to take on a fitter who stood out for the Union rate; there were plenty of men to be got for a shilling an hour, and once you started that sort of thing in the works you never knew where it would stop, he would stand for no special privileges for any bloody Bolsheviks. No self-respecting skilled fitter, Union or non-Union, would work for a shilling an hour; and Pry, though he said nothing about it, refused to take on men at less than the Union rate. God knew that was little enough and he had once been a fitter himself. He made a compromise: they would borrow a fitter from the power station, when there was urgent work to do, and to this Cloacher at once agreed, though the power station, who paid their man one and six, charged half a crown an hour for his services. Pry worked on the breakdown jobs himself at week-ends and in the evenings, and rejoiced that the fitter who assisted him was then getting time and a half for overtime.

One Sunday evening, the shock-haired Watts from the power station, who was cheerfully trespassing on 'SUNSAP' property, ran into Pry, his hair clotted with lubricating oil and his boiler-suit black with grease.

'Hallo! Herr Managing Director,' he said. 'Going to the Ritz?'

Pry explained tersely a few of the things that were wrong with his plant.

'In this age of plenty,' declaimed Watts, 'machines are displacing human labour. One machine can now do the work of fifty men: the problem of to-day is the enjoyment of the leisure created by machines for

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mankind; the cultivation of recreational pursuits. . . .'

Watts went in with Pry and lent a hand in getting a forty-eight-inch pulley off a broken shaft. His shirt and trousers were old anyway, they didn't matter; he had been feeling rather bored.

A very solid friendship had developed between Pry and Billy Watts. The Watts had had their first baby a month or two after the Prys, and scarcely a week went by when the Watts were not at Snoot House or the Prys in Sunnylands. As it happened Watts and Pry had both got their degrees, of London University, as evening students at the same Polytechnic. Watts had gone further than Pry and got his Doctorate. They both felt for the old Poly a quiet and very real affection. In the Poly there was no collegiate stuff, no swanking and old school ties, it was a place where they had each worked like the devil for years and years and years; they had both had to earn their living at the same time, but they had discovered that as the price of that, Industry only demanded two-thirds of each day. The other third was free, and they had used it at the Poly. Sundays, Bank Holidays and Christmas Days had been Godsends of free time in which to write up notes. There had not been many outings in those days, and whilst the day students at King's or University College could lounge in blazers, play tennis, and flirt on the river, Pry and Watts had had for their lightest recreation problems in entropy and differential calculus. But their note-books were enlivened with caricatures of the lecturers and scurrilous bits of verse which served as mnemonics for formulae. The Poly had been a very

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good friend to them in the difficult matter of fees, and the total cost of their degrees was in each case something under forty pounds, including books, instructions and examination fees, comfortably spread over many years. In a society in many respects so rotten, and so hard on those who have no money, the assistance given by the London County Council and the Board of Education to young students at the Poly seemed a rare and beautiful thing. They forgot that it was a cheap way of training the technical employees whom later Industrialism would exploit and on whom it was coming more and more to depend. They saw that any snub-nosed and penniless apprentice in London who was prepared to work, could get the finest technical education in the country free, and make his way to the highest academic distinctions of the University. Pry and Watts knew what that meant and held it to the honour of London and their country.

But to work all day and study every night, from sixteen to twenty-two or twenty-three, when the body is growing and the personality developing to manhood leaves its mark on the man. There is a physical and a nervous strain which later life can never quite efface, a permanent disability to play, a lack of knowledge of the streets and the social arts and graces, a tenacity and strength of character, but plenty of bitterness, and a feeling that, for ever fighting against odds, one must seize life as it comes and choke out its meaning with a grip that can never caress.

Watts held what he had, fast with both hands, consolidated his position in industry, bettered it progres-

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sively. Pry demanded something of his life for himself, again and again let everything go, but grasped the flying opportunity, laid for years in wait for it if need be. That was the essential difference between the two men. Their friendship was animated by constant but not at all serious undercurrents of jealousy. Pry envied Watts his physical strength, for Watts could shin up the straight stem of a poplar and plunder a rookery. Watts envied Pry his little car, envied him his sudden jump to five hundred pounds a year, said it wouldn't last. Pry envied Watts his canniness, his way of never spending a halfpenny without getting value for it; envied him his Ph.D., his solid scientific papers on the theory of combustion, that in time would bring him a Professorship or a practice as a consulting engineer. Watts envied Pry his opportunism, his venturing into synthetic chemistry, into business, into anything that came to hand, and, as it seemed, getting away with it. He might quite likely get there first, though where 'there' was neither of them could tell.

The two men were often mistaken for brothers, Pry with his laughing, inquisitive nose, and Watts with his rebellious shock of hair; and both of them had for a soul something as devoid of sentimentality or superficial romanticism as a Boyle's Law tube.

'We are the technical intelligentsia,' said Watts.

'The architects of the future,' said Pry.

'We are the lower middle class . . .'

'The sleek *bourgeoisie* . . .'

'All sing!' said Pry.

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During the month of August things continued to go well. The plant, with some coercion, continued to produce fifty per cent more 'SUNSAP' than it had been designed to make; the balance of the six hundred tons for Ireland was filled into gallon cans and shipped to Dublin and Belfast; the English farmers who at first could only be induced to give the stuff a trial were now responsible for a steady growth of sales. It was in August that Pry staged the first exhibition of 'SUNSAP' at a Fat Stock Show. And whilst their banner, with the intriguing words 'Food from the Air' fluttered over the 'SUNSAP' stand in the showground at Overbury in Wiltshire, Buck Reilly in his aeroplane was flying over the Irish Free State, trailing the same caption across the sky, swooping low over the villages to drop his pamphlets in showers. There was even a mention of 'SUNSAP' in the London papers, for one of the pamphlets from Buck Reilly's aeroplane had fluttered into the face of a film star, when she was being photographed on Kingstown Pier. 'SUNSAP' was beginning to get known.

The lack of any competition or of any counter offensive of publicity from the Coda, through the big cattle food manufacturers, and the sugar refineries, made Pry a little uneasy; it could only mean that they were biding their time or that they regarded the prospect of 'SUNSAP' being successful on the market as too remote to be significant. Intelligence men from all the big companies called incognito at the stand at Overbury, took the available literature, and asked questions of Pry and Miss Theta, hoping to catch them off their

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guard. Such men were incessantly on the prowl. The general public and the Wiltshire farmers showed the liveliest interest. Crowds gathered before the Stand, watching the illuminated working model of a cow dissolving its bones; and whilst Pry and Miss Theta talked on the Stand, a boy from Pry's lodging, whom they had dressed up as a page, took parties of interested farmers from the Stand to see the two pens of pigs — one lot selected for their plumpness and fine condition with a placard 'Fed on "SUNSAP"', and another lot of more ordinary pigs placarded 'Not fed on "SUNSAP"' — in the part of the showground reserved for live stock.

It was Miss Theta's first experience of a Fat Stock Show, and she displayed a quite unexpected flair as a saleswoman; in her white laboratory coat she looked to the general public like Research incarnate, and somehow the crowd were kept on tenterhooks with the hope that she would there and then perform an antiseptic operation. She thoroughly enjoyed herself, and with a surprising aptitude emphasized what there was to be said to the advantage of 'SUNSAP', and suppressed the rest, as to the manner born. Enough 'SUNSAP' had already been sold for there to be complaints. Some of the farmers complained that they had fed their pigs with 'SUNSAP' as instructed by the makers; the pigs had lost weight, or the pigs had got diarrhoea, or the pigs had got the romps and were so excited about 'SUNSAP' they couldn't lie still and fatten properly. Miss Theta dealt promptly with complaints. She had none of the sophistication of the professional Com-

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plaint Squasher who finds a place on the staff of every big firm. She was not a glib and resourceful liar, she trailed no red herrings, knew nothing of the technique of making sporting offers to lead the complainant out of range of the law, nor did she try to pacify the customer. 'The customer is always right' was not her motto. She went straight *at* him. He said he had used the stuff as directed; just how much in pints *had* he given the pigs? Usually he couldn't remember. What was the general condition of the pigs before 'SUNSAP' was administered? What precautions had been taken in the matter of pig hygiene? Were the houses properly ventilated and drained? Were the pigs pure bred? Had he permitted the contamination of a double cross to creep in? Had he the pedigree of the pigs? Her method was to take the unfortunate pig farmer severely to task, show him he knew practically nothing about his job, and then send him away thoroughly repentant and ashamed of himself. After each of these encounters she wiped her hands as though she had picked an unsatisfactory animal out of one of her experimental cages, chloroformed it, and dropped it in the incinerator. Pry watched her from the corner of his eye. *He* was engaged in pure mathematics and commerce as opposed to the biological branches of Science. It was his part to persuade the farmers to pay twice as much for 'SUNSAP' as he knew it to be worth.

If the sales could be kept up over the season, Pry would become a Director of the Company. Cloacher would be vanquished. They would manufacture on a large scale—and therefore much more cheaply. The

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drain of loss on the bird-bath business would be stopped. The extravagance of the offices at Agastral House would cease. Graball could whistle for his remaining over-riding commission. The price of 'SUNSAP' would be reduced, it would then sell on its merits at a fair price. In the meantime, any argument that induced people to buy, short of deliberate misrepresentation, was pragmatically justified. If it meant proving that  $x$  equals  $2x$  by introducing factors as imaginary as the square root of minus one, well, that should be done.

By the end of August the sales had gone so well that it seemed certain they would exceed the fifteen hundred tons that year. Pry, with a great sense of relief, went away with Mary for a holiday. He went to Denmark — and spent seven days out of his fortnight with merchants in Copenhagen, negotiating an agency for Denmark. He pulled off the deal, and for all that Herr Johanssen said, 'I mean if in Denmark it shall be possible to sell at all is veiled in the darkness of the not certain future', came home with an order for another hundred tons of 'SUNSAP' in his pocket.

## CHAPTER XXVI

## TROUBLE IN IRELAND

IN October the excitement began to cool off. Agents had been appointed all over the country, and were selling 'SUNSAP' steadily; stocks were accumulating, and with luck they would manage to get through the winter without having to refuse an order. There was time to begin work on the long deferred task of doing something with the pure glucose which crystallized out: they had over fifty tons of it. Fortunately the corn syrup people had paved the way for its sale — they got it from potatoes — by fanning a widespread rumour that it cured digestive complaints, and that it was especially good for the nourishment of children. Sweets were being made from it, and all the proprietary feed-while-you-sleep racketeers were so loud in praise of d. glucose that Emil Fischer must surely have turned in his grave.

The Manna Proprietary Company wanted to buy the lot, offered a very comfortable price, but Pry in congratulating himself on the deal, had reckoned without the exciseman. All along, the excise people had not known what to make of 'SUNSAP'; there was nothing in the regulations about what the duty should be on sugar manufactured from the air, and the official view was that it didn't exist. A way had been found round this difficulty, in the case of 'SUNSAP', because although strictly speaking it did not exist, it was being

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sold in the same way as molasses for agricultural use, on which no duty was payable. So long as the sugar content did not exceed a specified figure, the stuff could be sold duty free. But when it came to d. glucose it was a very different matter. On the makers' own admission the glucose was a *synthetic* sweetening material for human consumption. Saccharine was the only synthetic sweetening material in the classification, therefore d. glucose did exist and it was saccharine. The duty would be one and sixpence an ounce. Pry argued with the excise people, but there it was, the conclusion was inescapable: one and sixpence an ounce, and the stuff must be put into bond, locked up under excise seal. They did that; and thereafter the 'SUNSAP' works and Mr. Pry were under suspicion; Excisemen made surprise visits at any old time, and were often to be found prowling about at night, presumably hoping to intercept the unloading of the boats that crept up the creek under cover of darkness. To the reiterated assertion that d. glucose came from the air, like 'SUNSAP', the Excisemen nodded indulgently: 'Oh, yes, old man, we understand,' as though he were saying that he, Pry, was the Tsar of all the Russias, the natural son of Louis XIV, or Napoleon on St. Helena.

Although the pressure of work had eased perceptibly, there was still no time for Pry to follow through the whole process of getting a special rate of duty assessed for their glucose, and after filling in the first score or so of forms, Pry grew tired and left the job as a legacy for the future.

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On November 3rd Pry received the first news of the trouble that had broken out in Ireland. When he returned from lunch he found Buck Reilly sitting in his office; all the bounce gone out of him and looking the picture of despair.

‘It wasn’t my fault,’ he said.

‘What wasn’t your fault?’

‘Every penny I had I put into “SUNSAP”, I’ve worked like a nigger. I got it selling in every village in the country, there isn’t a man in the Free State who hasn’t heard of “SUNSAP” . . .’

‘I know, but what on earth’s the matter?’

‘They’re out to break me, the swines, they’ve finished me. Pry, I tell you, I’m ruined. Look at that!’

It was a bill pulled down from a wall. Pry unfolded it and spread it out on the desk before him. It had the one word **WARNING** in black type across the top, and underneath it an extract from an official publication of the Free State Department of Food, dated April 24th:

It has been brought to the knowledge of the Department that certain persons interested in the sale of a preparation known as ‘SUNSAP’ have stated that this preparation is recommended by the Department as a foodstuff for animals. This preparation has *not* been so recommended, and is still undergoing tests by the scientific officers of the Department. Pig farmers and others raising live stock in the Saorstát Éireann are warned against the unendorsed claims made from time to time by those

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selling proprietary feeding stuffs, and are advised to make no change from the rations recommended in the official bulletins of the Department, without first referring to their local Animal Nutrition Advisory Officers.

'It's all over Ireland.' Buck Reilly thumped the table nervously with his hand. 'Pasted up in every bar, it stares you in the face from every telegraph pole, the farmers have taken fright and won't buy any more.'

'Who has done this?'

'*Your* friends, the Coda, the gang you tried to sell the process to . . .'

'How?'

'How do I know it; because they've got people out all over Ireland, saying you offered it to them, and they turned it down officially, because "SUNSAP" is no good. That's how I know. You tricked me fine.'

'Buck, do you believe *I* had any hand in this?'

'Not you, you're on the level, but your bloody Board: they knew it wasn't any good, they knew the Coda had turned it down, and they sent you to dump it on poor little Ireland and ruin some poor sucker like me.'

'Pull yourself together, man. I tell you the stuff's all right. **THE STUFF'S ALL RIGHT.** You understand?'

'Well, what are you going to do about it?'

'Fight them. I don't know how. I'm coming to Dublin with you.'

So that was the game: the Coda had watched Buck Reilly all the summer, smiled at the banner that

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trailed behind his aeroplane, gathered in from their agents and spies particulars of every ton he sold. Now when his sales began to be big enough to encroach on their trade, they had dug up something the Department had published six months before — a gentle chiding for a mistake of enthusiasm — taken it from its context, printed it big, made it appear like a veritable warning of plague, and undone, almost in a night, all that Buck Reilly had done in the year. Pry made no mistake about that; this warning, unless something could be done, would be the end of 'SUNSAP' in Ireland. Cunning of them, not to put their name on these bills, the farmers would think the Department, whom they had good reason to trust, had reissued this warning with such emphasis for some very good reason. And the Coda would not stop there, they would spend a million pounds if need be to achieve their end. It would become for them a matter of pride, their monopolies were not to be challenged. This was how it had come, the dreaded obstruction from the Coda.

Pry put the matter before the Board. 'How much could the Company afford to spend . . . ?'

'I say this Buck Reilly has brought the trouble on himself, let him get out of it as best he can, it's nothing to do with us.' Cloacher had the ear of the Board.

'It's always the same when you have to deal with these erratic Irishmen,' said Major T. Haw-Stag.

'Buck Reilly's money tided us over when we were in a hole,' said Pry indignantly. 'Are we going to back out now, leave our agent in the lurch, and do nothing to protect the reputation of our product?'

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'I feel, for my part,' said the Chairman, 'that it would scarcely be honourable for us to do nothing. I propose, gentlemen, that Mr. Pry should go to Ireland to investigate, and if anything can be done in counter-propaganda, we should spend, eh, not more than two hundred pounds.'

The proposal was adopted.

'Get over there, and do what you can,' said the Chairman to Pry. 'I shall speak to Lord Houndsditch myself. I scarcely expected this of the Coda.'

In Buck Reilly's offices in Dublin there was a great heap of the posters, torn down from walls and telegraph poles. 'I've got my three travellers on it, doing nothing else, for every one of these accursed posters they bring me here I pay them a penny; but it's no good, as soon as we pull them down, the Coda men paste them up again, they follow us about . . .'

'I'm going to see Dr. O'Sullivan,' said Pry, '*by myself*.'

On the way to Moyne Pig Station Pry saw hundreds of the bills.

'I was expecting to see you,' said O'Sullivan, getting up from his microscope. 'I think this is a damned shame.'

'What did Buck Reilly *do* to start it all?'

'Oh, one of his men was talking to somebody in the pay of the Coda, thought he was a farmer, and said the stuff was recommended by the Department, when it wasn't you know, my tests were all right, but the Department's got to go steady with a new thing, you'd agree that yourself?'

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'Of course, and then . . .'

'The Coda crowd made a fuss with the Department, and they had to publish a denial.'

'Which the Coda saved up and used when the time was ripe . . . What are they selling themselves?'

'Oh everything! Oil cake, maize, soya meal, salt lick, molasses, manures, potash, chemicals, tractors, ploughs, all the ordinary things . . .'

'Nothing of Irish manufacture — you've no cause to favour them?'

'No, but they've got Irish names you know, you can't nail them down, they operate through Irish firms that they have bought up; they'd print their leaflets in Irish — if anybody east of Spiddal could understand it.'

'I see. Now your Irish press has not lost its independence as ours has in England. What will you do to help?'

'I am not sure, your stuff is first class and I want to see it manufactured over here, but you are going the wrong way to work; your people open their mouths too wide for immediate profits. The price is too high. There have been failures over here because the farmers are not using enough. If I say that four pounds are required in a ration and you compel your agent to charge so much for it that he has to tell the farmers that two is enough, what do you expect? Coda, or no Coda, that is not a straight deal. In face of that what can I do?'

'Publish your findings; say our first tests are confirmed; stress the proper ration; give me permission

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to reprint your paper and send it to every farmer in the country.'

'Intact?'

'Every word you say.'

'I'll think it over,' said O'Sullivan.

'Come on,' said Pry, back in Buck Reilly's office, 'let's get out in the country; let's see the pigs.'

The agents of the Coda had done their work well. The Irish farmers who had been so ready to believe all that Buck Reilly told them about the new magical 'SUNSAP', had been just as ready to believe the suggestion of the Coda men that it was poison and an elixir of ruin. At farm after farm every misfortune that had happened to the pigs; every bad litter, or death from disease, even every pig crushed by a lumbering sow in its infancy, was a victim of 'SUNSAP'. It was a contamination and a curse, and dangerous even to throw away. Every farmer who for any reason was dissatisfied with his pigs blamed 'SUNSAP', and swelled the rumour of alarm that the Coda bills had started in the country. To argue against this prejudice was a waste of breath.

But some of the farmers, a pitiful minority, said solidly that the stuff was good, and Department or no Department, Coda or no Coda, they would continue to use it; and some, more cautious, had fed some pigs with 'SUNSAP' and some without to compare effects. It was on these last that Pry and Buck Reilly concentrated their efforts. There was no great difference one way or the other, between the pigs that had 'SUNSAP'

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and those that had not; the differences, such as they were, were interpreted in accordance with the partiality or prejudice of the farmer.

But these men, according to Buck Reilly and Pry, were scientists, men of intelligence with open minds, whose opinions, good or bad, would assist them to establish the facts; that was all they wanted to do. If the farmer would make a further small experiment and sign a statement about it, it would be a privilege for the manufacturers of 'SUNSAP' to recompense him for his trouble; would he *weigh* the pigs fed on 'SUNSAP', and those without, and allow the result to be published?

That seemed fair enough. But very few of the farmers had a weighing machine. Pry and Buck Reilly hired one, and took it about in the car.

The pig weighings created quite a sensation. Farmers from miles around got to know where the weighings were to be done, and assembled in the manure yards, and in rows along the fences to watch the experiment, to see fair play, and to jeer at these quacks with their food from the air, whose iniquity was going to be shown up.

Pry stood on a box and addressed them: ' . . . if the pigs fed on 'SUNSAP' weigh less than the pigs not fed on 'SUNSAP' we are liars and the stuff's no good — is that what you say?'

'It's a bloody washout . . .'

'Very well, and if the pigs weigh *more*, we are right and you will believe what you see with your own eyes. The scales can't lie.'

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There were some jeers, but the sporting instincts of the farmers were aroused. Pry was taking a big risk, and he knew it, for the weighings were not rehearsed; no one could say what the pigs would weigh.

It was too much trouble to weigh all the pigs, it would take too long.

'Now,' said Pry to the farmer, dramatically, 'pick out three pigs from each pen: pick out the worst you can find of those fed on 'SUNSAP', and the best of those without.'

The farmer drove out the pigs: it was only Pry, cold and half desperate, who saw the psychology of what was happening. The farmer did *not* drive out the worst of the pigs from the 'SUNSAP' pen, he drove out the best. However violent he might have been in his abuse of 'SUNSAP', it was just impossible for him to let down a sportsman, or be associated with a failure before his neighbours: he drove out the best.

The weights were chalked up beside the scale for all to see:

SUNSAP	3 Pigs	332 lbs.
No Sunsap	3 Pigs	303 lbs.

The crowd cheered; and the farmer with his entire family assembled triumphantly round the scales, with Buck Reilly and Pry, with the pigs carefully prodded into the foreground, to have their photograph taken.

In that locality the rumour against 'SUNSAP' was stopped; and the farmer signed a testimonial which, with the photograph, was published in the local paper.

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On a dozen farms about the country the weighings were repeated, and eleven times the result was in favour of 'SUNSAP'. A confidence trick? A little discovery in applied psychology? Whatever it was, it worked, and the figures were better than the facts. Back in Dublin, Pry sat at a desk in Buck Reilly's office, steadied with a succession of cups of tea, writing articles for journalists of Buck Reilly's acquaintance to get into the Irish papers. The need had arisen, and he wrote stuff that the journalists were glad enough to put their names to, let alone being paid twice for it—once from their papers and once from Buck. Pry was fighting for 'Food from the Air'; and the cunning and intellectual force of what he wrote was a surprise to him. Necessity had released an unsuspected reserve of energy and power. The articles were something that the Coda could not counter; for no one in their pay could write as Pry was writing then, they had no one to whom it mattered enough.

The articles achieved their object. A question was asked in the Dáil; the Coda was severely criticized for instituting a campaign of warning which purported to be from the Free State Government, and were ordered to remove the bills, further exhibition of which was prohibited unless the words 'Issued by the Co-ordinated Defence and Vital Industries Control Board' were printed plainly on them. They were not even permitted to substitute the names of their Irish nominees. Pry's last piece of under-cover work in Irish journalism was high praise of the political party in power for strong action, and an assertion that when

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the Department of Food found it necessary to warn farmers they could be trusted to do so in their own time and in their own way; no volunteer assistance should be permitted by any *British* Control Board. The bills were removed and the Coda dropped that line of attack like a hot cake.

Dr. O'Sullivan published his report on his final tests with 'SUNSAP'. He recommended its use; but only at the strength that had been found necessary in properly conducted scientific tests; he said bluntly that if less were used the farmers would merely be wasting their money. He said the price must be reduced, for to use too little would bring discredit on a valuable new feeding stuff and result in a loss to Irish agriculture, through simple undernutrition of stock.

'And you want me to send *that* to every farmer in the country,' said Buck Reilly. 'You've only got me out of the frying-pan into the fire — you've got my money and now you're going to make me halve my price . . .'

'I promised O'Sullivan it should be sent, and it's going to be sent. I've ceased to care about the price.'

*'You've* ceased to care . . .'

'The stuff comes first, you or our Company have got to face a loss, I don't care which, over the remainder of your three hundred tons. I am forcing another issue. "SUNSAP" must be manufactured here, in the Free State.'

'Who by? Who's going to put up the money?'

'I don't care,' said Pry, a distant look in his eyes.

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'I don't care . . . sufficient for the day . . . for God's sake give me another cigarette.'

Pry returned to East Bullock to find that the sales for the month of November had fallen off: there was the same trouble in England and Scotland; the farmers were finding 'SUNSAP' too dear. The Coda had not yet tried to queer the English market, and except for a handful of complaints which Miss Theta could easily attend to, 'SUNSAP' had done all that was claimed for it. Grade A carcasses were being obtained from a high percentage of animals, one-fifth of whose food had been synthesized from the flue gases of the East Bullock power station. Testimonials from the butchers and slaughter-houses were coming in; but all the advantages of increased fertility, high-grade produce, and somewhat accelerated fattening of stock did not represent so much in cash value to the farmers as the increased cost of the rations when 'SUNSAP' was used. It did not pay. The price was too high and the farmers to whom stockraising had become of necessity a matter of bookkeeping were quietly omitting 'SUNSAP' from their purchases. If the animals got a little cod liver oil and an occasional lick of a salt cake on the wall, that was all by way of accessories that they could afford.

But Pry felt it did not matter; the year was nearly at an end, they had already sold more than the fifteen hundred tons, and the synthetics side of the business would show a profit over the year. In a few short weeks now the Board would keep their promise and make him Managing Director of the Company. He would then

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conserve its remaining sources only for 'Food from the Air'. He would triple the area of the solar radiation plant, increase, by three times for a start, the output of 'SUNSAP' and bring down the price to its economic level. All that could be done, a mere matter of arrangement and intrigue. The effect of 'SUNSAP' on pigs and cattle, on the contrary, was not subject to arrangement. It might very well have failed there, but it had not; the hardest part, the speculative chapter in the history of 'Food from the Air' was over. Sometimes the problems with which he would be confronted in imposing his will upon the other Directors appeared formidable, but Pry, emboldened and hardened by all that he had been through already, faced and foresaw his future difficulties, confident that he would be able to overcome them.

He saw beyond them; and with the reports of Grade-this and Grade-that carcasses before him from the slaughter-houses, resolved that before he died he would at least put an end to the *necessity* of this crudity of using animals to elaborate the protein constituent of human food. The savagery of eating the bodies of animals in order to get the chemical substances of which they are composed should be brought to an end. The clumsiness, the messiness, the sheer inefficiency of so roundabout a process appalled him. They had synthesized sugar, why not protein? Why not build nitrogen into those molecules. Already they had made one step forward; they had got a certain amino-acid, and once again fortune had favoured them, for there was nitrous oxide in the flue gas, a small quantity but sufficient. They had their source of nitrogenous gases

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ready to hand. Why should they not make protein; why should they not try? But first the business must be made to pay dividends, before the necessary extra money would be permitted to dribble into research. Pry no longer wasted mental energy in anger at that. He accepted it as a condition of life.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE COLD LIGHT

ON Christmas Eve there was a certain spirit, if not of rejoicing, at least of relaxation, amongst the 'SUNSAP' gang at East Bullock. Nobody was disposed to shout, for they were by no means out of the wood, but they had worked very hard, and it did seem that they had almost won through. The sales stipulated by the Board as a condition of survival had been comfortably exceeded. With great expense of patience and temper, Cloacher and Mrs. Block had been kept at bay; the gang was still intact. Everybody, from Pry to the lab boy, felt that his particular job would go on; that there would be opportunities, more money, better jobs, as the new industry that they had started steadily grew. And Cloacher, whose bird-bath business everyone could see had failed completely, would be turned out, and that would be better all round.

'Here's mud in his eye,' said Ackworth, in the coffee-room of the Bullock Arms, where it somehow happened they had all gone to stand each other drinks.

'Hush!' said Pry. 'Some one will tell Mrs. Block.'

'—— Mrs. Block.'

Plummox was counting out the money in his pay envelope, on a tiled table, wet with beer dregs; his eyes bulging, as though it were about to turn into something.

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'Is it all there?' asked Pry amiably.

'The missus will be pleased with that,' said Plum-mox, solemnly picking up nothing, and shaking his head at it. 'Five pun' for Christmas, thank you very much, Mr. Cloacher.' And he buttoned nothing carefully in his pocket.

Pry turned away; far from giving the men any bonus at Christmas time, Cloacher had refused even to pay them for Christmas and Boxing Day. Pry, unable to let that pass, had gone to each man quietly, given to each the two days' money out of his own pocket, and told them to keep their mouths shut. Plumox's little pantomime was an exquisitely sensitive action.

The fitters and the process men and the boys, the two young chemists, Ackworth and Pry, Miss Rose-wood and Miss Theta, who happened to be at the works, the handful of people who had, between them, piloted by Dr. Zaareb, made their first fifteen hundred tons of Food from the Air, now held their first and only celebration. A drink, and a quarter of an hour's embarrassed gossip on the way home, that was all, no dance, no band. Miss Theta, who didn't much like going into a pub, could not understand. It all seemed so inadequate; shouldn't they have a toast; drink to success in the New Year, or something like that. Pry shook his head. But as they were going, she raised her voice and called out: 'A Merry Christmas to you all.'

Plumox answered, 'And a Merry Christmas to you, Miss'.

Pry and Mary, with Michael, now just old enough

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to run about, spent Christmas at Snoot House. A certain tolerance on Pry's part in the matter of inexpensive comforts and coloured objects, of which Mary had been quick enough to take advantage, had changed their rooms from a mere encampment into something more or less resembling a home. She had even bought a picture to hang on the wall, a reproduction of a colourful Irish landscape by Paul Henry, in a gilt frame.

Pry eyed it suspiciously. 'Since we now have such a nice home,' he said, 'we will make the experiment of spending Christmas in it, better go out and buy all the usual things.'

'If you're going to be beastly . . .'

'No, I mean it.' He gave her thirty shillings extra, over and above the usual housekeeping money. ' . . . I've brought home something pretty for Michael.'

The pretty thing that he had brought home was contained in two little bottles of organic chemicals, very expensive and difficult to make, which when poured into water, would give off 'cold light': a vivid play of blue and green light as the substances decomposed in the water.

It seemed unnecessary to wait until Christmas day to work this spectacle; so they kept the baby up that evening, darkened the room, and let him see it at once. The unearthly lights in a dark room nearly frightened the child out of his senses; and the production of the shilling Christmas tree, which Mary had already bought, with its tinsel and glass trinkets, was necessary to pacify him.

The rest of the 'cold light' Pry took over to Watts's

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house on Christmas Day; and whilst Quince and Mary compared their housekeeping accounts and the technique of Mothercraft, Pry and Watts measured in lumens the intensity of the cold light, with a wedge screen, a camera and some photographic plates. They were agreed that though Christmas may be Christmas the world over, hell is most definitely a place where you are compelled to hang about pretending to be happy, doing nothing.

The best part of the future that Pry now saw opening up before him was the building of a bigger plant, the starting up of more active research in the laboratory, more men working, more chemists, travellers of their own out on the roads, Miss Theta running a nutrition advisory service, perhaps even an experimental farm: a greatly increased web and hum of activity. It was hard to wait until the auditors had got out their accounts for the year and the Board had invested him with his new powers. A little strange that they had not already begun to discuss things with him; but then they never did do anything until the last minute, it was merely characteristic. Pry talked it over with Mary, telling her of his plans.

'What a change, Ham, from the way you talked two years ago. You are full of confidence now, you are making light of the difficulties, you are coming out of your shell. . . .'

'Am I?'

'But Ham . . . oh, my dear Ham, I am so much afraid for you. Do you remember what you told me, that night in Durham, when you first came into my

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room: "Don't trust people, trust your knowledge of them"? Don't change, Ham, or life is going to hurt you terribly. . . ."

After Christmas there was a period of marking time; nothing could really be done, until the crucial decision to reduce the price of 'SUNSAP' had been made. The whole reorganization of the Company would centre round that imperative necessity. It was only possible to work things out on paper, to be ready for action, and Pry's plans were like the scenario of a whirlwind. The Companies' agents for South Wales provided a temporary diversion. They sent claims from three of their customers who threatened to bring actions for compensation for alleged losses through the use of 'SUNSAP'. The agents advised immediate settlement, as these actions, whatever the outcome, would be prejudicial to the reputation of 'SUNSAP'. What had happened was perfectly transparent to Pry. Mr. Jones had gone to these farmers, who were old customers and cronies of his, and said, 'Look here, I know times are bad, you've not been able to get any sort of price for your pigs, and you can't pay my accounts: are you sure you didn't lose over that "SUNSAP" stuff? If you made a claim, whatever, and threatened the manufacturers with the law, they wouldn't dare let it go to Court . . .' It didn't matter much to Jones & Co. whether they sold 'SUNSAP' or molasses, or fish cake or sharps or middlings, but it paid to keep on the right side of their customers, and be quite sure that whatever they did buy should be bought from Jones & Co. Jones & Co. were not the

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only agents who tried on that sort of thing. Pry would make short work of these little duplicities when he became a Director. He knew a firm of unscrupulous, fighting solicitors. In the meantime he got reports on the pigs which were the subjects of the claims, for Messrs. Hagstone, Brown & Bog, expert evidence on which they took Counsel's opinion. It was felt that in the event of a High Court action with Messrs. Jones, there was nothing much to fear.

On January 1st, Pry's year's agreement with the Company had run out, and no new one had been made. He was very busy, but no longer legally employed by the Company; a curious situation. He asked Cloacher for a copy of the auditors' report on the past year's trading:

"That's all right, me lord, it isn't ready yet, but you've done fine, they'll be building a new suite of offices for you."

A terrible apprehension took possession of Pry; what a fool he had been to let Cloacher get the accounts into his hands; what an incredibly blind fool.

But at last a letter came from the Chairman of the Board. He thanked Pry once again for all that he had done for the Company, said that the measure of success attained with 'SUNSAP' enabled them to carry on, but that only one shilling in the pound of the preference share capital remained to be called up — they were down to their last shilling, and a complete reorganization of the Company would have to be made. He asked Mr. Pry 'to open his mind without hesitation' on every matter that he thought relevant to the situation, in

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brief, to submit a report on how the entire Company should be reorganized.

'It has come at last!' said Pry, planting the letter down before Mary, and striding to and fro in irrepressible excitement, ' . . . the biggest opportunity of my life.'

The letter was followed promptly by a request to lunch with Mr. Leary at the Nominal Club. Mr. Leary told Pry just how desperate the financial position of the Company really was; he, Pry, who had concerned himself only with the synthetics, might be entertaining a misleading impression. The 'SUNSAP' business was a very little business, with a gross turnover of less than twenty thousand pounds a year. The Company had three million pounds share capital. Practically the whole of that capital had been lost; Mr. Pry might think that the remaining shilling in the pound still represented a large sum of money, more than enough to extend the 'SUNSAP' plant and provide working capital; but the successive calls of a shilling at a time on the shareholders had yielded less and less, the shareholders, many of them people in quite humble circumstances, had been bled white; and the last call could not be expected to yield very much. The Company was in debt. The landlords of the three London offices, the mortgagees of the Bingham factory, the solicitors, the patent agents, the people who supplied the concrete for the Kosoff business; all the creditors of the Company and the people who had got pickings for themselves when the carcass of the Company was fat; they must all be kept at bay; the

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money must be parcelled out to them or there would be a petition in bankruptcy, and that would be the end. The process for making sugar from the air might be of very great value; it might in fact be worth three million pounds, but it was an intangible asset, they had tried to sell it, as Pry knew, but it could not be sold. The only chance remaining was that the 'SUNSAP' business might grow into a big thing, and pay the Company out of debt and bondage. But there would be very little money that could be spared to increase the 'SUNSAP' plant, nothing to give it a real start. Mr. Leary wagged a finger at Pry, ' . . . and that brings me to something that is going to be very hard for you to face: there will be no money for any more research, it may be years before you can have your chemists and your laboratory again.'

'You want me to close down the laboratory, to dismiss Ackworth and his assistants — and Zaareb, is he also, to leave the ship . . . ?'

'I am afraid so, they are not necessary for making "SUNSAP", which is your only commercial product. You must manage on a skeleton staff, and you yourself must devote your whole time to sales. You must become an ordinary business man like any other, with a product to sell. There will be no time for you to do anything except push sales; I am telling you this in advance, for if you want the Company to act on the report that the Chairman has asked you to prepare, you must present everything cut right down to the bone.'

'Tell me, Mr. Leary, just one thing: are these Mr. Cloacher's views?'

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‘They are my own, and I am giving you my advice, showing you the only way open to you. Mr. Cloacher is an older man than you, he has more experience of the world and of business matters.’

Pry asked nothing about his own position in this new scheme of things, when or whether the Board were going to keep their promise and make him Managing Director; he was nervous about that, and a certain pride prevented him from speaking of it.

Pry went to see Zaareb.

‘Won’t it wait?’ said Zaareb, pulling his dressing-gown round him and carefully closing the window, so that he would not be sitting in a draught. ‘You look as though you were going to be shot, you’d better have an “injection”.’ Smilingly he put a few grains of a harmless drug in a tumbler, squirted soda water on it and handed it to Pry to drink.

Pry told him of the Chairman’s request and all that Leary had said.

‘Quite right!’ said Zaareb. ‘Cut things down all round and sell “SUNSAP”. It’s the only thing they can do in the circumstances. I should have said so myself. You young men never see that Research is a cultural pursuit: you wouldn’t expect Big Business to pay you for writing poems or having music lessons, would you? We have found out one or two very interesting things, but I have always told you it would take us years to complete the synthesis of the polysaccharides and protein, and even so we could not count on success. Somebody *will* do it, but it does not have to be us, you know.’

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The sedative had very little effect on Pry's expression.

'But what are you so depressed about? For ten men who can make things, there's only one who can sell them. You will have all you can do, and I don't see that they can manage without you. And what is your choice; do you *want* to be unemployed? What does your wife say about it?'

'It hadn't occurred to me to ask her.'

'Of course it hadn't. By the way, Ackworth isn't married yet, is he; a change won't hurt him.'

'You are just trying to make it easier for me.'

'Not at all, you must do what you think right. Now, about myself: if you are not going on with the research, there's no need for me to come fagging out to East Bullock any more . . . Oh, don't look so glum about it, it's a disagreeable journey and I've plenty to do here. You know more about making "SUNSAP" than I do, now — I can't help you in that.' He hesitated. 'I tell you what I will do, I will come out once a fortnight, and the Company can pay me a hundred guineas a year. You can put it forward as your own suggestion, and if they ask me, I'll tell them it is necessary for somebody to keep an eye on you. It scarcely pays my bus fares, but even so I shall be getting more out of it than I got for my synthesis of quinine.'

Quinine was then universally made by the Zaareb synthesis, the firms that exploited his discovery had made fortunes out of it, but Zaareb had received not a penny. His scientific papers had brought him his F.R.S., and the Presidency of the Berzelius Society; for

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thanks to a small income derived from an early invention luckily sold in the tanning industry, he had been fortunate enough to work out his syntheses of natural drugs on his own, with no employer to claim his inventions as their industrial property — as the children of slaves are the property of the slave owner. There had been nobody to say: this belongs to us, it is our monopoly, it is not to be published.

It did not matter to Zaareb that the Zaareb and Pry synthesis of sugar could not be laid before the Royal Society. It would have made Pry's name. That was a thing to think of in passing. The discovery belonged to Hydro-Mechanical Constructions Ltd. The salary he was paid naturally covered all such things as that.

Pry studied the figures for the financial position of the Company which Mr. Leary had given him — he had not the separate accounts for the synthetics business, but he had his estimates and he could not be far wrong there, he knew every item of expenditure. The more he studied the figures the more desperate seemed the Company's chance of pulling through. There was only one way: close the London offices; finish with the bird-bath business and with it Cloacher, dispose of the Bingham works, and save every penny for pushing the one product 'SUNSAP' at a greatly reduced price. It would have to be done with the very minimum staff and it would mean the grimdest sacrifices all round. To give up the research would not save much but it would have to go. Later, there might be money to start it up again — sometime in the

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future. But the main thing was to stop the Company's extravagances and to cut the loss on the Kosoff business. The report was going to upset the Board; but if it was to be an effective plan of campaign and 'SUNSAP' was to be saved, it had got to be absolutely ruthless in its terms. The alternative was to be obsequious, discursive and cautious, shifting responsibility, in short not to do what he had been asked outright to do, but to play for favour, avoid offending anybody, and then watch the Company fritter away to bankruptcy, dragging with it all that was left of 'Food from the Air'.

Had he the courage to say what he ought to say? He had been successful so far, and if the Board were serious, and wanted what they had asked him for, no matter how distasteful it turned out to be, they should respect his integrity. If the Board were against him. . . .

"Take the risk, Ham," said Mary, quietly, "there are no two ways for you."

Pry took the risk.

## CRISIS

AN ominous silence followed the dispatch of the report. Mr. Leary came once to the works, was closeted with Cloacher for an hour, and left without speaking to Pry. Twice Cloacher went up to Town, in the black coat, striped trousers and winged collar which he always wore when he was going to a Board meeting or to see any of the Directors. Mrs. Block's nagging voice was unnaturally quiet, she moved about as slyly, and as obviously possessed of a secret, as a cat looking for a place in which to be delivered of her kittens. Something was in the air, and he, Pry, was being excluded from it.

Had he done wrong in saying the price of 'SUNSAP' must be drastically reduced — surely they were prepared for that; had he asked too much in demanding that money must at once be allotted for extensions of the 'SUNSAP' plant, to treble the output — was not that obvious? Had he taken too much on himself in saying the luxury offices in Agastral House must be given up; and that the superfluous Secretary, the old doddering Brigadier-General Thump and his staff, must be dismissed, and the Board meetings held in a hired room or at the Works, with one of the Directors nominally acting as Secretary? Did they not see that as common sense, had they not talked of it often enough? Had he

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overstepped the mark in saying the Company must change its solicitors; could they contemplate the scandalous agreements that Hagstone, Brown & Bog had let pass and say a change was not urgently needed? Or were solicitors sacrosanct? Could he have avoided saying that the Kosoff business was dead; that it had dribbled down from the extruded houses to exhibition ornaments, to fencing posts, to concrete fenders and bird-baths, and failed all along the line; that the only thing to do was to stop it altogether and cut the loss? Had he been disloyal in saying that with the passing of the bird-bath business Cloacher and Mrs. Block, Cloacher's chauffeur and all the rest of his hangers-on should also go; that they had been and could be of no assistance in either making or selling 'SUNSAP', and were therefore superfluous, like the Chrysler car for Cloacher's private use? Had he been wrong in telling them they must stake everything on 'SUNSAP', they had nothing else to sell? Had it not been enough to offer to forego all they owed him of his five hundred pounds; to throw his colleague Ackworth out of employment; to cut Zaareb's fees to a hundred guineas a year; to stop all the research? Had he been extravagant in saying 'SUNSAP' could not sell itself, that they must have salesmen on the road, and that Miss Theta must be taken on their permanent staff to maintain an Advisory Service? Had he been provincial in saying the most important market for 'SUNSAP' was their own country, that attempts to sell on the Continent which cost so much in money and effort for no return should be abandoned? Was it so foolish to demand that

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Graball & Co. should be dispossessed of their remaining rake-off on every sale in the British Empire and prevented from interfering with their own conduct of sales? Could Graball *not* be got rid of by the firm he had suggested?

And could any man have put forward a more comprehensive, a better-thought-out or more definite plan for the future? What was wrong with his forecast of what the sales would be; was it not reasonable enough; did it not show them the best, the only way, with the available resources to mend past follies and build a business with a real promise of success?

A thousand times Pry went over the report in his mind, seeking where he might have made a mistake; matters of detail could be arranged otherwise, of course, but in the main he could see no mistake — except in stopping the research, but the Board had demanded that.

The request to attend a special meeting of the full Board was a relief. But at this meeting neither his report nor its subject matter was mentioned. The Board treated him as though not one of them had ever met him before, and to his amazement the Marquis of Dillwater began to question him about his qualifications, as though he were an unknown applicant for employment.

‘Tell us first, Mr. Pry, where you went to school.’

‘Pimlico Commercial College.’

‘And you have a degree, I believe, of what university?’

‘London.’

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‘You went to King’s College?’

‘No, I went to Polytechnics in the evening.’

‘Your father’s circumstances did not permit him to send you to college?’

‘I was earning my living as a working apprentice with a firm of chemical engineers.’

A stenographer was taking down notes of his answers, and Pry’s gorge was slowly rising.

‘It becomes necessary for us to inquire into your social position: what was your rank during the war?’

‘I was at school when it came to an end.’

‘And your family — the Stamfordshire Prys? What was your father’s profession?’

‘My father was a schoolmaster. I know nothing of any Prys in Stamfordshire.’

Pry was finding it increasingly difficult to keep his temper. ‘May I ask,’ he said, ‘what is the purpose of this interrogation?’

His question was disregarded. ‘Have you ever held a responsible commercial position?’

‘If you will consult your records you will find how long I have been with this Company. Before that I was Technical Manager of a breakfast food company in Durham. My initials are C. R., I have a wife and one child, I enjoy good health, I am punctual and industrious, and of temperate habits. I have no morals, no principles and no politics.’

Pry bit out these addenda with concentrated venom.

‘You have not answered my question, I shall repeat it: have you ever held a responsible commercial position?’

## CRISIS

Pry turned towards the Chairman, but he was rather ashamedly looking down at some papers.

'My qualification for the only job with which you are concerned is the fact that I have done it and am still doing it successfully; I see no reason why I should be arraigned like a criminal before you.'

'I think that is all we need ask Mr. Pry,' said the Chairman. He gave Pry a look that had in it something of reassurance, and Mr. Leary said 'Good afternoon, Mr. Pry'.

General Thump approached Pry in his office as he went out, as though inviting an outburst of feeling, but this time Pry was careful to say nothing.

'Sometimes I can guess what the Board are up to,' he told Mary, 'but this time I can't. It's beyond me.'

'Perhaps they are examining your qualifications for a Directorship; and this is just their childish idea of being businesslike.'

'It's possible . . .'

'Perhaps you've offended against their creed.'

'I've given them cold facts without fear or favour.'

'Very likely that's the trouble: you have shown no regard for their power and importance.'

'How can I show what I haven't got.'

'You're hopeless, Ham . . .'

'But they've always encouraged me to be frank; they have allowed me a certain licence; they know me, and they don't expect anything else. They've always been friendly enough, I can't understand why they should suddenly go cold and try to humiliate me. How could

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Kosoff sit dumb and allow me to be treated like that, and Leary . . . and the Chairman. It isn't in keeping with their characters. The Marquis of Dillwater, he's a self-important prig anyway; but Kosoff and Lambsbottam, no, I cannot understand it.'

'They are about to do you an injustice, and their bad conscience eases itself in a newly found dislike of you.'

'You think that's it?'

'I'm afraid so, it's no use blinking the obvious.'

'But Leary and Lambsbottam — they have their queer sense of honour, they shuffle and procrastinate, but I've never known them go back on their deliberately given word: they promised me that if I sold fifteen hundred tons of 'SUNSAP' at a profit last year they would make me a Director. It is a part of their code that to honour a promise, however rash, must come before all considerations of expediency. They are English gentlemen.'

'Then if they don't want you, they'll seek a formula, a high-principled gambit of evasion.'

'Oh, let's chuck it. We are getting nowhere!' But it was not possible to 'chuck it'. The thoughts went round and round in Pry's head and gave him no peace. The change in the emotional atmosphere of his relations with the Board was plain enough; he had been in favour, and he was so no longer. That should have told him at once that he had lost the game; but he shut that realization out from him. The human organism has ways of avoiding pain in which volition plays no part.

At the works, the manufacture of 'SUNSAP' went on as though nothing were happening. News of the crisis

## CRISIS

was not communicated to Ackworth or any of the staff. Despite its high price, 'SUNSAP' was still selling at the rate of fifteen or twenty tons a week; they sent off a tank wagon full of a crude mixture of formaldehyde and acetone, accumulated from the by-products. In the laboratory the attempts to condense the simple sugars into starch, on which they had been working intermittently all the past year, had opened up a way, not towards starch, but strangely enough towards the synthesis of protein; Ackworth had found an old paper in the Chemical Society's library which threw an unsuspected light on their work. They had their first amino-acid and were obtaining others.

Pry ran into Monsieur Cocaine in Queen Victoria Street. Since Cocaine had been shepherded out of the works into a waiting car by the man-moving Mr. MacDuff two years before, Pry had scarcely thought of him. Cocaine, the original inventor, the fanatic who started it all. M. Cocaine gave Pry one glance of loathing and would have passed him without speaking. Pry stood squarely in front of him: 'How are you, Monsieur Cocaine, what are you doing now?'

'I laugh, Meester Pry, already MacDuff is gone; soon also you will go — I am Cocaine, it is only Cocaine who knows what is the Cocaine process. I laugh, I wait, ah, longtime I wait, I am so patient. When I snap my fingers you will come to me and say "Pleese Monsieur Cocaine it is my family who starve, pleese to give me a little job." And I laugh. I spit at you.'

Cocaine looked very ill; his body, always a little craned over to compensate for the missing weight of

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his arm, now looked wrenched, and his remaining hand shook terribly; his nerves had gone to pieces, and still he lived with his dream, the first victim of his idol, the winning of food from the air. It was an idea that maddened men, that possessed them in spite of themselves. Pry looking at this wreck of Cocaine, realizing it was impossible to talk to him, that he had passed out of the story and would carry his passion with him to the end, a broken visionary, remembered the advice that the swash-buckling Mac-Duff had given him with the old brass sextant that now hung on the wall at Snoot House: 'Good luck, Mr. Pry, and keep sane, remember that your difficulty will be just that, put all the money you can in the Bank, and keep sane.'

Zaareb was very cool about it all. 'I am not interested,' he said, 'in your impatience to call yourself a Managing Director — these hierarchical distinctions are of no importance. But the Board are wasting time. Their only hope is the success of your scheme. It's a desperate chance, but I agree it's the only one, and if they are going to take it there isn't a week to lose. The losses must stop.'

Pry showed Zaareb a copy of his fatal report; he had told him of its contents, but not so far shown him the actual text.

'H'm,' he said. 'Of course they won't like it, but it's no inconsiderable piece of work. What you will never realize is that our Board does not want to do business. They don't know what it is. What they want to do, and what you may be sure they will do, is to preserve

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amongst themselves an illusion of their consequence. That's why they are surrounded by parasites and toadies. They probably think you are an upstart, trying to dictate to them and a bit wild — you are, you know, to their way of thinking.'

The blow which broke the spirit in Pry and determined at one stroke the ultimate fate of the Company, was delivered one Thursday morning at the end of February. It took the form of a letter to Pry from the Chairman, which began 'Dear Sir' and continued as follows:

'I am requested by my co-directors to thank you for your report of the 22nd of January, which has received the careful consideration of the Board of this Company.

'I regret that owing to the failure of your Synthetics Department to show a profit on the past year's trading, as was envisaged in the memorandum last defining the terms of your employment by this Company, the change in your status which was to have been reviewed at this time does not arise for consideration.

'In view, however, of the services which you have rendered to this Company in the past, my Board are prepared to offer you further employment at your present salary subject to three months' notice on either side. The balance of the guaranteed bonus of £500 which you have not yet received as commission on sales will be paid to you as soon as the financial position of the Company permits. But you will not be entitled to any further commission on sales as from and after the first of January of this year.'

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'I have further to inform you that in order to promote the efficient development of the Company's business and to avoid wastage of the time of the Board on matters of executive detail, Mr. George Cloacher has been appointed Managing Director of this Company. Your further attendance at Board Meetings will not therefore be required, and you will in future report to Mr. Cloacher in all matters which have hitherto received the attention of the Board.

'In adopting this course, my Board have consulted only the requirements of the Company's business, and under the new arrangement, I feel confident of your continued loyalty and of the exertion of your fullest endeavours to retrieve the position of the business with which you are associated.

'If you accept re-employment upon the terms herein stated, which I must inform you are not subject to discussion, kindly confirm your acceptance to Mr. Cloacher in writing as soon as possible.

'Yours faithfully.'

## CHAPTER XXIX

### AND THEN...

PRY's reception of this letter was as cold as the terms of the letter itself. It was an insult and it was a lie, but against its injustice there was no appeal. It crushed Pry too completely for him to find relief in anger. Romantic possibilities, that he should kill Cloacher, or poison himself, or smash up the laboratory and walk out, rose in his mind, but he dismissed them with an icy contempt. He sat at his desk going mechanically on with his work.

It was the end of his captaincy of the first food from the air. Where an hour ago there had been a burning and insistent passion, which it seemed would sustain him through every difficulty, there was now nothing. He knew without having to consider how or why that the spell was broken and that his work, even if he went on, would inevitably fail.

That the year's operations had not shown a profit was a lie, but his anger at that did not provoke him to fight, as perhaps he might have done. His anger was deadly and turned in upon himself: he saw the whole structure of Industrialism as a fabric of tyranny and lies — as well be angry because the ground is hard or the sea cold.

For Pry there was no relief in sentiment, he saw too clearly that tyranny can be frustrated only by tyranny:

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by the tyranny of money and power, by the tyranny of circumstances and necessity, or by the tyranny of non-participation. It remained for him to accept or to reject the Board's offer of employmen.

To accept would be to watch his own work destroyed, to see the 'SUNSAP' business dribble away into disrepute and failure as the constructional business had done, to be blamed for it, and all the time to suffer the humiliation of subservience to Cloacher, to feel him like a publican sitting naked on his face. To reject, to go, would be to destroy his own work at once, and by his own action, for without his knowledge it could not even dribble on. To go would be to put the Company into instant confusion, to bring down their house about their heads.

To stay would be to get his salary of five hundred pounds a year for a time, perhaps as long as a year — economic provision for two years of his life, and it was not to be despised. To go would be to take at once a year or more of liberty, to purge away the taste of Cloacher and the Board, and be a free man. He could do that, for on leaving the Company he would at once sue them for the balance of his five hundred pounds, and they would have to pay. That generous bonus of five hundred pounds! his 'interest in the business', the little something for his inventions, that was to have been paid to him in a dazzling and breath-taking lump sum; that he had then 'been given a chance to earn' — over again — as a commission on sales; that he had earned over again; but that even yet they had not paid to him, only a dribbling, reluctant hundred pounds.

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To stay would be to give the Board a further victory over him, and the thought of that was gall. They would congratulate themselves that they had taken his measure aright, that they had humiliated and kicked him, broken his pride, and still he could not afford to throw up his job. Oh, it would give them such a sweet sensation of power. To go would be to be even with them, to leave them to Cloacher.

'If only,' thought Pry; 'if only the Old Man (by which he meant his father) were alive. He would tell me what to do.' And with that thought he seemed to hear his father speaking to him, he could hear the very words he would have used, so quietly and so incisively:

'It is always a mistake to be influenced by men whom you have ceased to respect. Consult your own advantage. They care nothing for you.'

Pry wrote, not to Mr. Cloacher, but to the Chairman:

'I acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 25th instant. Under the terms of my service agreement with this Company I am entitled to inspect the Auditors' Report for the past year's trading. I should be obliged if you would kindly give instructions for this document to be shown to me.'

There would be some satisfaction in showing by what misrepresentation of fact the 'SUNSAP' business had been made to show a loss. Mr. Herbert P. Ketch had told Pry some years before that he had insufficient knowledge of phenomena. He would rectify that omission in one particular: he would analyse the lie that had been used against him, present these honourable

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English gentlemen with a concise exposure of their formula, and they would be obliged to keep it on record in the files of the Company.

Pry finished his day's work, permitting no one to see by any change in his manner or bearing that anything was wrong. He intended to keep up this piece of acting at home also until he had made up his mind. But Mary saw through it instantly.

She rushed to him before he had made three steps into the room, and as she clung to him, he saw with astonishment that tears were already streaming from her eyes. 'Show me the letter,' she said. 'Don't try to keep it from me.' It was Pry who stood solid and was the comforter.

She knelt beside him on the floor as he sat to his meal: 'We must go, at once, Ham. I will not have you tortured so.'

'Ssssh, Mary. Who says I care; can't you see I'm bloody well grinning; eat your kipper before it gets cold.'

They talked beside the fire that evening; and all Pry's indignation and his anguish found a voice. It was not a pretty exhibition, and its recital may be spared. There are times when all men are children, storming and crying over a broken toy; were it not so there would be more folly and even less of hope amongst mankind.

That night Pry and Mary lay together and their love had a deeper significance than ever before. It was all they had of certainty and peace, of honour and trust, of security and warmth, in an alien and hateful world. 'We have Michael,' said Mary. 'Yes,' said Pry, 'he is a fine boy.'

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The Board had no conscious animus against Mr. Pry; and had they known the effect of their action upon him they would have been considerably surprised. In the first place they had not wanted him on the Board as a Director, and that was all. But instead of saying so, they thought it would save hurting his feelings, and going back on their own promise, if they went 'tactfully' to work. Cloacher, seeing how the wind lay, arranged the accounts so that they did not show a profit on the 'SUNSAP' trading; the Board did not ask him to do so, that was scarcely necessary; but they did not look too critically at the accounts when they saw that they showed no profit: that would have been to look a gift horse in the mouth. It made things easy for them, and incidentally it showed that Cloacher, if anybody, was the man to have on the Board. He was tactful, and understood the gentlemanly way of doing things. His carbuncle was rather nasty; and he hadn't much education, but he had a County background, was diplomatic and a man of the world. They felt he was one of them.

Cloacher, of course, had done nothing illegal with the accounts; the allocation of this or that charge to the Garden Ornaments or to the 'SUNSAP' department was a matter for the discretion of the Board, or whoever they had entrusted to deal with the matter, in this case Cloacher. The auditors had taken their information from Mr. Cloacher, and if he said that the whole of his salary and that of Mrs. Block and of his chauffeur, and the upkeep of his car, was chargeable to 'SUNSAP', there was no one to dispute it. But he had been a little more cunning than that; he charged two-thirds only of these

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salaries to 'SUNSAP', on the principle that as its manufacture occupied the New Plant and two-thirds of the old factory, it should bear all its own, and two-thirds of all the other costs, which he chose to describe as 'overheads'. With some other 'adjustments', attributable to Mrs. Block, to whose genius they owed their impenetrable distortion, Mr. Cloacher had contrived to show a reasonable, but sufficient, loss on the 'SUNSAP' trading.

From Mr. Cloacher's point of view it was the kind of thing one did not think twice about. It produced a slight reduction of the loss on his own department, it injured Mr. Pry and the 'SUNSAP' business, of which he was intensely jealous, and it furthered his game of playing up to the Board. By a further piece of diplomacy, which came so naturally to him that he scarcely noticed it, he led the Board to believe that as a matter of course Mr. Pry had seen these accounts and that he agreed to them.

It had all worked very well, for Pry, the born fool, when the dear old Chairman asked him to open his mind about the reorganization of the Company, walked straight into the trap. He thought the accounts showed a profit, that the Board would be all over him, going to make him a Managing Director, and that he could speak to them as an equal. It was easy to convince them that Mr. Pry had overstepped the mark, that he had taken liberties not to be tolerated from an employee who had failed to make good, and that he should be put in his place. Then Pry's report itself: it couldn't have been more damn silly; it demanded stopping what was left of Kosoff's Constructions and no more Continental

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trips — which finished Mr. Pry with Kosoff. It demanded that General Thump should be sacked — and General Thump was a relative of the Chairman. It demanded that the Board Meetings should be held in a hired room or the factory — which infuriated the Marquis of Dillwater. And it said, in no uncertain terms, that the ‘co-operation’ enjoined by the God-walloping Mr. Leary on Mr. Cloacher and Mr. Pry — his pet solution for all difficulties — was impossible. That antagonized even Mr. Leary. The clever sarcastic Mr. Pry had thought he was going to kick him, Cloacher, out: well, the laugh would be on the other side of his face now.

That Pry, in writing his report, had been actuated only by a desire to save the business; that he saw that as the only thing that mattered; and acted without regard for persons, did not occur to the Board. Such an attitude of mind was foreign to them, their atmosphere was that of the political caucus, and they saw Pry as a pretender, playing only for power. Pry was dictating to *them*, and that was not to be tolerated. They would sooner put the Company in liquidation at once than permit such a thing. But in their treatment of Pry they had been, as they considered, very fair. They had given him an opportunity to show his qualifications for a Directorship, and he had lost his temper. They had not sacked him, or reduced his salary; they had not even accepted his offer to give up the four hundred pounds which the Company still owed him, but let it stand as a liability; *that*, it seemed to them, was an action so generous that it fully made up to Mr. Pry for any disappointment he

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might feel about Mr. Cloacher being made Managing Director in his stead. It would put everything right, and it was, they thought, a most diplomatic way of assuring Mr. Pry's future allegiance. The far-sighted employer of labour tries to make his employees happy in their work. Not only was their action generous, forgiving and broadminded; it was modern and up to date, by the best principles of enlightened self-interest.

The Chairman had proposed that he should write a friendly personal letter to Mr. Pry, explaining their decision and adding something about the sacrifices they were all called upon to make to save the Company, but in the end he had acquiesced in Mr. Cloacher's view that it would be advisable for the Company's solicitors to draft the letter with his, Cloacher's assistance, and for the Chairman to sign it. (One of the things Pry had not failed to do in his report was to attack the Company's solicitors.)

When the Chairman received Pry's letter, revealing that he had not been permitted to see the accounts, he did at once ask Cloacher for an explanation. Mr. Cloacher said it was an oversight, he had been so very busy. . . . The last thing the Chairman desired to do was to harass or criticize Mr. Cloacher, he understood of course the great pressure of work that now fell upon him — but he had been under the impression that Mr. Pry had seen the accounts. Now that Mr. Pry seemed to desire to see them, perhaps Mr. Cloacher would be able to find time just to let him do so.

Cloacher sent Mrs. Block in to Pry with the accounts; he had not the courage to face Pry himself, and, though

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he was now Managing Director, he was still very much afraid of what he called Pry's sarcasm.

Pry, all unaware of actualities in the psychological situation, attacked the accounts with all the intellectual ability he could command; prepared a statement which turned a searchlight on the 'adjustments' and exposed the true state of affairs. He sent it to the Chairman, neat, without a word of pleading or complaint. A statement of facts. Pry's action belied his conception of himself as the victim of omnipotent tyranny and lies; it betrayed an underlying belief that there must be a right of appeal; that the truth clearly presented must prevail over falsehood. It betrayed the curious romanticism of Mr. Pry.

The Chairman handed the statement to Mr. Cloacher to 'investigate', and Pry received no answer. 'A lot of stuff,' Cloacher explained to the Board. 'No need to waste the Board's time with it; that sort of man always squeals when he can't make good.'

'Well,' said Zaareb, to whom Pry told all he knew of this firing in the dark, 'what are you going to do?' It is clear they can't get on without you.'

'I feel too sick to trust myself to make the right decision.'

'Nonsense, you will put on your hat and walk out; then if they want you they can come to you, on your terms.'

'They'd sooner wind up the Company.'

'Then let them, if they are not going to do anything, the Company is doomed anyway, it's useless to hang on to a thing that is moribund.'

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'Oh, I don't know, there's always just a chance. Cloacher might die, something might happen, you can never be sure, even of the worst. . . .'

Pry had risen and was looking out of the office window at the 'SUNSAP' plant then standing in thin snow and sparkling in a break of the cold February sun. He saw how it had come into existence: the long search with the tubes in the laboratory, hour after hour; the strange intentness of will as he had contemplated them; the will, that it always seemed to him, had at length *forced* those molecules to combine; then the excitement when Zaareb introduced his blue catalyst, and the percentage of sugar leapt from a mere presence to seventy parts per million; the accelerated pace of the work then; and at last his own discovery of 'Trigger Action' and the way of using low temperature heat, that made the manufacture of food from the air a commercial possibility; the steady increase of the sugar concentration to two hundred and fifty thousand parts per million; the old experimental gear that made the first hundred gallons, the gear that it had been his dream should stand in the Science Museum, with a rope round it and a ticket about the Zaareb and Pry synthesis, precursor of the vast irradiation plants of the future. Then the new plant; the designing of it; the mad manœuvres with the Board to get it built; the contract signed; then the ribs of concrete emerging out of the confusion of shuttering, the walls filled in, the green glass gleaming; and at last the completed thing, bold in the August sunshine, an assertion and a challenge, risen on the marshes; his sense of power and of achieve-

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ment when it worked as he had forecast it would, and the first charge of 'SUNSAP' ran from the evaporators into the waiting barrels. And then the tests: Miss Theta's rats, O'Sullivan and his prize sow, the nervous waiting for results, and again success. The 'literature', the ideas, the sales talk that he had seen as a kind of magic, and somehow produced so well; and the beginning of the sales; the rush and bustle of production; the orders coming in by every post; Buck Rcilly's brave aeroplane trailing the sky with the banner of 'Food from the Air'.

Whilst he had the opportunity to stay Pry could not leave his plant and his 'Food from the Air'. His allegiance to that had nothing to do with Cloacher and the Board. They had the power to suppress, to jeopardize, to delay for a time the new thing that had come into being; they could humiliate and embitter him; they could ruin their own business; but the synthesis of sugar was a step in the progress of invention and discovery which owed little to them and their kind. The great heritage of technical knowledge of which the synthesis was but one outcome had been built up by better men than they. Not for them or for anything they could do or say could he desert his plant and abandon the winning of food from the air. It was impossible.

'I shall stay,' said Pry quietly, turning to Zaareb again.

Zaareb shook his head.

## NO MAGIC ABOUT IT

CLOACHER's first action was to sack Miss Rosewood. The Company could not afford any private secretaries for Mr. Pry at two pounds ten a week; and the kind of typing that was good enough for him, a Director of the Company, must be good enough for Mr. Pry. One of the bird-bath girls could do his letters when she wasn't otherwise busy. Pry said nothing. The girl allotted to him could not write shorthand, and Mrs. Block set her washing dishes in the works kitchen whenever Pry gave her any work to do. So Pry cut down the correspondence, stopped following up old inquiries and confined himself to answering the more important letters day by day, or as many as he could deal with himself on his typewriter. To prevent a deliberate confusion and scattering of the sales records he moved the filing cabinets into his own office and filed everything himself, keeping the keys in his pocket.

Then Cloacher sacked Ackworth. Pry felt a Judas about this, for if he had not mentioned Ackworth in his fatal report Cloacher would not have known that he was not absolutely indispensable. It would be just possible, but it would be very difficult to manage without Ackworth. Ackworth didn't mind. His capacity for 'not minding' was remarkable. When Pry ashamedly went to talk to him, after he had received his notice, the amazing Mr. Ackworth said:

## NO MAGIC ABOUT IT

'It's all right, old chap, I'm saying nix for nowt, but I saw it coming, I've got another job. The money's lousy, but it will be better than staying here now. Funny I was just going to get married, but my girl will wait . . .'

Ackworth would always get a job; for his was a real acceptance of the conditions of industrial life: he could stand the strain better than most, just because he let things pass over his head. He would end up by making a comfortable job of something that needed a much more enterprising man, and hold it for years and years. Industry is full of Ackworths.

It did not seem to have occurred to Ackworth that the knowledge he had of the synthesis was something he might perhaps have sold with his services to another firm; he had taken a job at two hundred and fifty pounds a year as assistant chemist in a paint factory.

Then Cloacher sacked Plummox, who had then become foreman on the 'SUNSAP' production, and their one experienced fitter. He said that as they could not work at full production in March to keep on these men was an extravagance; it was necessary to economize; when the summer came Pry could take on two men from the labour exchange, or, if he wasn't needing him, they could borrow his chauffeur.

'Very well,' said Pry, 'if you say so, it's idle for me to say anything.' With the help of one young chemist and the unskilled men who were left Pry managed to keep the work going, but he was no longer able to go about the country, interviewing agents, getting 'SUNSAP' sold.

Nothing of course was done about giving up the London offices or stopping the drain of loss on the

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garden ornaments business. With an experienced commercial man like Mr. Cloacher in charge the Board permitted themselves to believe that such drastic measures were not necessary. He told them they were not; all that was needed was to cut down the 'SUNSAP' staff and increase the price of 'SUNSAP' itself, then with his push and influence the business would go right ahead. Always grateful for counsels of optimism, the Board did not see the utter failure of the pre-cast concrete business as significant evidence of the quality of Mr. Cloacher's 'push' and 'influence'. That, as he explained, was solely attributable to financial crises and the condition of world trade. The Board had unbounded confidence in Mr. Cloacher, as they had had in turn in Kosoff, Paul Peterson, Klamac, Cocaine, MacDuff and Pry. Pry was now their last scapegoat, and Cloacher their last hero who could do no wrong.

In Cloacher's ointment there was only one fly. He had no understanding of how 'SUNSAP' was made, what it was, for what purposes or by what means it could be sold. He had to depend upon and refer constantly to Mr. Pry. It was not to be expected that he should set to and learn such things for himself, they were matters for juniors, but Pry was insolent. He made what he considered to be the most friendly overtures to Mr. Pry, and said nothing against him except behind his back, but Pry continued to treat him as though he were dirt. He had gone to Pry and said: 'How are you, me lord, cold enough for you? Now we must put our heads together, see what we can do,' and Pry had only stared at the place where the alopecia had broken out again

## NO MAGIC ABOUT IT

as though it made him feel sick and said: 'Thank you. What do you wish to know?' He was so bloody polite and sneering all the time.

Pry saw Cloacher's weaknesses clearly enough: saw his pathetic dependence on the woman Mrs. Block; saw his need to bolster himself up by bullying and swearing at underlings; saw the vacuum defined by his habit of lying and toadying to superiors; saw very well that if he could bring himself to flatter and stroke Mr. Cloacher he could manipulate him almost as he wished. He might even have played Iago and made him destroy himself, and certainly he could have become the power behind the scenes. But to flatter and please Mr. Cloacher was a form of prostitution of which Pry was incapable.

Pry told himself that he would just sit back and get a grim satisfaction while it lasted in watching the Company's inevitable progress to bankruptcy. But that was not possible either, for, when it came to the point, he had only one way of doing his work and such power as he had left he used to what he conceived to be the best interest of the Company, whose money he accepted and whose service he had undertaken.

Shortly after the Board had invested Cloacher with his new powers they called up the last shilling from the shareholders. With the call notices they desired once again to send a letter justifying their action, saying that the policy of their new Managing Director, his sweeping reorganization of the business, and what they were going to do with the money, would result at last in the repair of the Company's fortunes. They wanted the

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prospects of 'SUNSAP' presented in an alluring light, its cause pleaded as never before. For this, Cloacher went to Pry:

'Just scribble out something when you have time, and let me have it. I'll see you get all the kudos from the Board. . . .'

The one telling argument that the Board could have used with the shareholders, the fact that 'SUNSAP' had shown a profit on the first year's trading, had been blindly sacrificed. But with the rest Pry did what he could, saw what was wanted and wrote the stuff, and it was not 'just scribbled out', it was done as well as he could possibly do it, written, rewritten, corrected and tightened up. When it was incorporated in the draft circular letter which Cloacher got the solicitors to prepare for him — he could not string together three sentences grammatically himself — the Board congratulated him. He had produced something so much better than the kind of stuff that Mr. Pry used to write. . . .

Not one penny of the call money as it came in was allocated for extensions to the 'SUNSAP' plant or for putting travellers on the road; it was to dribble away, month by month, in maintaining the *status quo*. Pry made one last appeal to the Board. The Chairman refused to see him; Mr. Leary was out. He wrote a report: it was handed to Mr. Cloacher.

Pry was powerless; in the first agony of his defeat he had seen himself powerless and beaten, but, for all his coldness at that time, there had crept in a certain element of melodrama, a certain relief in twisting the knife in the wound; deep down, repulsed, there had been a hope

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that things could not be quite as bad as they seemed; but now, his own spirit ebbing out with each successive frustration, he had to face the fact that he was really powerless, that he could in fact do nothing. As the months went on he settled down to live with this realization, and that organic thing, his desire to make, to build, to do something with his life, its stoutest stem cut back, began to grow again in a multitude of little occupations, green enthusiasms and trifling time-passing hobbies, from the stump that was left. He took up photography, discovered an interest in surrealist art, and began to record his dreams . . . But that did not happen for months, a great enthusiasm, once so closely identified with the major processes of life as Pry's passion for the winning of food from the air had come to be, is not suddenly to be ended and cut short; it has a great momentum and dies only in a succession of diminishing rebursts.

A certain consciousness of the times in which he lived did more than anything else to bring Pry down to a bearably philosophic acceptance of frustration. To see his 'Food from the Air' coming to nothing whilst there was money and opportunity, could it but be taken, to make it a success, was to see the defeat of what seemed to him a good and a useful thing by nothing more than the pride and the stupidity of a few ignorant men. But then, so much more than the mere synthesis of food was being defeated all round him for no greater cause. Half the population of England were living impoverished and wretched whilst all about them, were they but allowed to use it, nature — let alone such

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industries as he had hoped to begin — made such bountiful provision for every human need. And whilst the peoples of the world had long since lost every need to fight amongst themselves for any inadequacy of food or pastures or minerals, they were all preparing for war. Europe was once again on the brink of war. The Nominal Government, fervently proclaiming that Great Britain had no enemies and was the enemy of none, had conscripted the resources of the country to prepare for a more terrible carnage and destruction than had ever been known in the history of the world. His own child, the innocent and merry boy, exploring the little province of his home with truthful eyes and tiny sensitive fingers, growing so rapidly, one of millions of children, who in their companies are the most beloved and the most important of all. Against them, to destroy them, the preparations for carnage were being made. In the shadow of such impending tragedy Pry's personal loss of his 'Food from the Air' was diminished and made mean, a little by-play in the internal defeat of a great people.

But even as the killing of Michael by a chance bomb, dropped in a minor reprisal for an air raid, would mean more to him than the ultimate outcome of any war, so the loss of his 'Food from the Air' was more than the general despair and hopelessness of his time. It was nearest to him.

There was nothing very spectacular in the steps by which Cloacher destroyed Pry's work; nor indeed anything consciously sinister or evil in what he did. He merely blundered and took the easiest course. He said,

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a dozen times a day, that he was saving the Company, and no doubt he desired to do so, for that would mean the continuance of a fat salary for himself that, at the age of fifty with a record of bankrupt businesses behind him, would not be easy to get again.

In refusing to meet Buck Reilly over the price at which 'SUNSAP' had to be sold in the Free State, and in refusing to replace a part of his stock that had gone sour, he said he was being firm and saving the Company's money. He was not being dictated to by any scatty Irishmen. Buck Reilly sold what he could of the soured stuff in the Free State and declined to continue with the agency. The soured stuff caused illnesses in pigs and cattle and damaged the reputation of 'SUNSAP' in Ireland more completely, by a train of legitimate grievances, than any adverse publicity from the Coda could ever have done.

In restoring to Messrs. Graball the exclusive right to sell 'SUNSAP' over the entire British Empire and giving them back all the commissions, fees and discounts that Pry had taken away, Mr. Cloacher believed that he had pulled off a very cunning piece of business. In the first place he believed that he had found in Mr. Silas Graball, with his sanctimonious and convivial habits, not only a brother Mason but a crony and a kindred spirit. He believed that he would be able to do what he liked with Mr. Graball, and by making Graball & Co. nominally responsible for all the sales, and dealing wherever possible with him, he took a very substantial part of Pry's former work out of his hands. It was one step towards finally getting rid of Mr. Pry, and old Silas

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Graball promised in the way of sales anything that Mr. Cloacher liked to suggest. His promises (without any commitment to perform them) made good reading for the Board, and they were persuaded that they had been very wrong indeed in allowing Mr. Pry to interfere with the Graball arrangements at all.

It was Mr. Graball who removed the difficulty about the price: 'SUNSAP' was by no means too dear. The mistake was in trying to sell it as a food. It ought to be sold as a condiment, a new kind of pig and cattle spice, for which, as anybody who really understood the business knew, they could charge what they liked. Only one thing was lacking in it: it did not contain any cod-liver oil. He, Mr. Graball, had an option on the output of one of the very best dog-fish oil works in the country. Mr. Cloacher should buy the fish oil from him, have it mixed with 'SUNSAP', sell it as a Graball Speciality, and success was assured.

'Why fish-liver oil?' asked Pry. 'Why not the hair of a Barbary ape?'

'If they want Vitamines A and D why not put in Vitamines A and D,' said Dr. Zaareb; 'do we have to tolerate these barbaric survivals?'

A few tons of the evil-smelling mixture were made, and Graball & Co. sold them — with the help of a great deal of advertising, which was two-thirds devoted to Graball & Company's other Specialities, and for the whole of which Hydro-Mechanical Constructions Ltd. paid. But the farmers who had used 'SUNSAP' with beneficial results and who were prepared to pay the high price insisted on being supplied with ordinary

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'SUNSAP' by the makers as before. The oil mixture did not take on, though with genuine cod-liver oil it might have become a sound enough side line.

Pry continued to deal with the great majority of the remaining customers directly from the works, but all the receipts passed through Graball and Company's books and they deducted thirty-five per cent. The Graball business remained what it was, a small business in the provinces; it did not suddenly send forth tentacles to the ends of the British Empire; its travellers did not even penetrate as far North as Yorkshire or as far south as Wilts.

The total sales of 'SUNSAP' fell at first to forty, then to thirty, then to twenty-five tons a month, and that year, as the summer advanced, there was no wild activity in the new plant. The time when twelve months before they had been working day and night to cope with the demand was something of the past that it was pleasant to remember; the plant was idle half the time.

'Even our Board,' said Zaareb, 'must realize that something is wrong . . . ah, that's *Centaurea, cyanis*, I think; remarkable to find that growing here, sport from a garden, must be . . .'

Dr. Zaareb, having looked in the new plant and commented on its 'air of inanition', was strolling undisturbedly along the creek, with an eye for the flora established there. Pry walked beside him.

'The colours are misleading,' said Zaareb, gently pressing over the head of the flower to look at it and then letting it go again, 'but the *involucrum* is very characteristic.'

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'Why should the Board know anything is wrong? They never come here; Cloacher only tells them what it suits him to tell . . .'

'You exaggerate Mr. Cloacher's ability to hide the body . . . Do you bring your boy down here to get these?' They were looking down at the edge of the creek where a shoal of tiny fish was flashing about.

'Never come near the damned place after half-past five.'

'No, I don't suppose you do; and your friend Watts over there, is he still trying to reform the world?'

'He's got a better job, he's leaving East Bullock in September.'

'Ah! so soon . . .'

'What do you mean *so soon*?'

But Zaareb did not answer, he had found another flower.

## CHAPTER XXXI

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PRY found there were two parts of his former work that he was allowed to do in his own way, for the simple reason that Cloacher attached no importance to them, and indeed scarcely knew they had to be done. The first was maintaining the quality of the product, ensuring the careful analysis and testing of each batch. That was something, for it meant that though they could not advance to starch and the proteins, their first achievement stood. Research workers, finding there was on the market this product called 'SUNSAP', which was always much about the same in composition and no mere flash in the pan, found it convenient to feed it to their experimental animals, and were beginning to take a very lively interest in attempts to determine what its growth-and-fertility-promoting constituents might be. To them the high cost of the product was of little significance, and the claim that it was synthesized from carbon dioxide began to be talked about a good deal. The correspondence with these workers, answering their questions and sending them supplies, Cloacher regarded as a simple waste of time; he did not understand what their letters were about and so left them to Mr. Pry. Pry seized on this work, which was highly interesting in itself; with Zaareb solid behind him to refer to, the reputation of the Company amongst

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scientific workers was maintained, and in fact, considering the short time they had been in existence, it stood very high indeed. All the more so because Pry had ceased to push 'SUNSAP' in any sense, and he corresponded about it with severe impartiality. He took a grim pleasure in doing so.

One action of Mr. Cloacher's, intended to weaken Pry's tenure and expedite his removal, had exactly the opposite effect, and considerably added to the strength of the Zaarcb and Pry technical combination. It occurred to Cloacher that if he let Pry have Miss Theta employed at the works, she would learn all that Pry knew about 'SUNSAP', and then he would get Pry dismissed and Miss Theta would do Pry's work, properly under his, Mr. Cloacher's, thumb. She wouldn't be sarcastic or challenge his authority, she would do as she was told under threat of the sack, and being a woman she would be grateful and understanding. This, having regard to the character of Miss Theta, was exceedingly funny. It made Pry laugh, not outwardly, but down his spine in little irrepressible chuckles, and laughter was something that Pry needed very badly. He put up a sufficient show of resistance to the suggestion to ensure that Cloacher would insist on carrying it out. Miss Theta joined the staff. She took one sniff at Mr. Cloacher and sized him up instantly. Then she walked round the works and encountered Mrs. Block. In the eyes of Mrs. Block, Miss Theta was obviously a 'lady' and Mrs. Block went down before her, told her her life story, hinted at her difficulties with Mr. Cloacher, begging for a little attention and sympathy. Miss

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Theta contrived to leave her satisfied and at the same time smarting from a casually impersonal remark that the sanitary and cooking arrangements were disgraceful.

The militant Miss Theta, who saw all men as slightly ridiculous, reacted vigorously to the poisonous atmospheric she found about her in the works. Her attitude was either '*Please* do not be puerile', or 'What is going on here? I won't have it'.

She took Mr. Pry in hand at once, told him his job was what he chose to make it; told him they were losing orders and must be losing money; that 'SUNSAP' was much too dear; and if the Board and Mr. Cloacher would not be sensible, it was up to him to bring them into line at once.

Pry smiled; such confidence was facile and impotent, but it introduced a breath of fresh air. Miss Theta borrowed Pry's car, investigated a number of complaints from Mr. Graball's customers, make short work of them, with complete disregard of Mr. Graball's interests, and whilst she was about it obtained names and addresses of other farmers in the neighbourhood; gave them, before they had time to gather what she was doing on their farms, some very sound and practical advice where she saw it was needed on any subject from personal hygiene to the construction of farrowing pens, and told them to use 'SUNSAP'. Then she came back to the works, had Ackworth's old office cleared out and whitewashed, and installed in it some fifty cages of white rats, which she brought from Pipperhay. She also obtained a large X-ray tube on loan, and settled down taking X-ray photographs of the knee joints of

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rats, which had something to do with accessory growth factors.

She also bought a kettle, a teapot, some cups and saucers and a large tin of biscuits, and arranged with the local dairy for a bottle of milk to be left for her every day. At a quarter to four she brought tea into Pry's office, and sat down, starting afternoon tea conversation exactly as she had been accustomed to do at the Pipperhay Research Station. Pry fell in at once with this audacious innovation.

'It isn't permitted, you know; Mr. Cloacher has issued instructions that in view of the Company's difficulties, no tea is to be made in the works, except by Mrs. Block, who will supply it in special circumstances only.'

'Nonsense,' said Miss Theta. 'Her utensils are filthy; if Mr. Cloacher objects he can tell me so; I shall deal with him.'

Mr. Cloacher stared very hard but said nothing, and the only consequence of this downright flaunting of his authority was that Mrs. Block bought some crockery of exactly the same pattern, and with a great air of consequence supplied Mr. Cloacher with his tea in as nearly as she could manage it the same way. She even went one better, for she bought a tray which she ornamented with pink ribbons, and a silver-plated sugar pot with tongs in the lid.

With Miss Theta at the factory the liaison work with scientists and experiment stations was much strengthened; they were able to meet the biologists on their own ground, and insinuate more and more suggestions for

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the use or investigation of 'SUNSAP'. Pry knew that this work could not be continued to fruition; that the Company would be bankrupt in a few months; but while it lasted he permitted himself to enjoy what he knew to be a fool's paradise. He embraced the *as if* philosophy. He reported to Mr. Cloacher on the need to put travellers on the road *as if* there was a possibility of that being done. He drafted the letters that ought to be sent to Graball & Co., to Ireland, to all the agents, to the landlords of the London offices, *as if* they were going to be sent. And having done these things, like problems in Euclid, he turned to the scientific work. The pathos of the situation did not escape him, but he ceased to look haggard and to have terror dreams at night.

He now saw and treated Cloacher as something by turns pathetic and ridiculous; occasionally his peculiar swinrishness hurt; but in the main Pry could watch him as a phenomenon.

When two-thirds of the money raised by the last call on the shareholders was gone, and it was therefore too late to do anything effective, the Board took alarm. They began to harass Mr. Cloacher, they demanded that an exact statement of progress should be presented to them month by month; they became statistically minded and prepared a form, on which the following information was to be supplied:

Month:

Number of Orders received during month:

Value of Orders received:

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Number of letters written (from postage book):

Number of telephone calls (*a*) made:

(*b*) received:

Total Number of persons including staff employed at works:

Number of hours worked by each person (on sheet attached):

Remarks (if any):

In addition to this set exercise, they required two pieces of free composition, one a report from the Managing Director in his own words, and one a report from Mr. Pry. By reading these documents the Board was informed — as they wrote in the minute book — of the exact position of the Company from month to month, and its affairs over a critical period received the most searching scrutiny and attention of the Directors. They could do no more.

It was the Chairman's idea that they should revert to the practice of having a report from Mr. Pry; and this was agreed on the condition that the report should be presented by Mr. Cloacher, who would remove anything that was put in merely to irritate or waste the time of the Board.

Pry wrote his reports, honestly and uncompromisingly, on the *as if* principle. As if the Board would see them without expurgation. Cloacher waited each month for Pry's report, pounced on it, and used it as the basis of his own piece of composition. Whatever news there was in it of anything done, he appropriated to himself, and expanded most elaborately with the

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assistance of Mrs. Block, the accountant, Mr. Silas Graball, Hagstone, Brown & Bog, and anyone else who would help him over the throes of composition. Of what was left of Pry's report, he just deleted all proposals for action, and had the few remaining minor paragraphs retyped. Pry filed the carbon copies of his actual reports and preserved them jealously, still unable to purge from his mind the notion that there must be a day of judgment.

The Board might have examined Mr. Cloacher's operations a little more closely at this stage had it not been for a lucky accident. The Bringham factory, which had been in the hands of agents for years, was at last bought by a firm of elastic boot-lace manufacturers. Despite the heavy mortage on the factory, the sale brought in a little money; and the Board could not thank Mr. Cloacher enough. It is true he had done nothing to bring about the sale, except leave the property in the hands of the agents who had had it all along, but the happy event occurred whilst Mr. Cloacher was Managing Director: a splendid vindication of their confidence in him. All the machinery remaining at Bringham was sold for scrap by the same agents, and this too brought in a little money.

The first thing the boot-lace people did on entering into occupation was to knock down the remainder of the specimen Kosoff dwelling house which encumbered their yard.

Very gently, not for one moment wanting Mr. Cloacher to feel that they were putting pressure on him, after so splendid an achievement, the Board suggested

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that perhaps, with the Bingham factory off his mind, Mr. Cloacher could now find some equally good means of making 'SUNSAP' show a profit. It would assist the Company if he could do that.

Mr. Cloacher had to do something. He could have produced some more promises from Mr. Graball, but in face of the tell-tale figures for the Graball sales, it would have been inexpedient to play that card again. It was Mrs. Block who relieved in him an uneasy suspicion of his own impotence; it was not his job as Managing Director to sell 'SUNSAP', that was for underlings — and who else but Mr. Pry. Mr. Cloacher called Mr. Pry into his office, and began to tell him that he took a very serious view of the way he, Mr. Pry, had neglected his work; that he deserved instant dismissal, but that if he would, even at that stage, outline a scheme to restore the sales, he, Mr. Cloacher, would consider it, let bygones be bygones, as he was not a hard man and he wanted everybody to be comfortable together, and he knew Pry had a family. . . .

Pry smiled. 'You have my proposals; you have them every month; I can only suggest that you act on them. But it is too late, and it is a matter of indifference to me what you do. You can ask the Chairman to give me notice and pay the four hundred pounds owing to me now, if you like; it would suit me quite well.'

Mr. Cloacher had, it appeared, been troubled in his mind about that four hundred pounds, he felt that Mr. Pry should have half of it, now that he, Mr. Cloacher, had succeeded in negotiating the sale of the Bingham

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factory to the advantage of everybody. With an oily, anxious smile, that exposed him completely to Mr. Pry, he said he would see that a cheque for two hundred pounds was made out at once.

That he should be bribed with his own money to do something he had already done, amused Mr. Pry, and he felt it only fair that he should perform some sort of conjuring trick. When his bank informed him that the cheque had been cleared, he typed out copies of his three last monthly reports, and handed them to Mr. Cloacher with his compliments and a receipt for the money.

Of the ensuing conversation with Mrs. Block, Pry only caught one phrase, which was something more than audible through the brick wall of the office: 'We shall see who's the office boy and who's the Managing Director.'

Pry rubbed his hands, now merely interested to see what would happen next. He was scarcely prepared for what did happen.

It was proposed that he should take a voyage round the world.

When Cloacher told him about it Pry rubbed his eyes and could hardly believe his ears. But there it was, Cloacher had convinced the Board that to send Mr. Pry round the world interviewing merchants and negotiating for the sale of 'SUNSAP' everywhere from Honolulu to Hong Kong, would be a bold stroke of policy; and it would finally remove Mr. Pry from the works and get rid of him. A very cunning idea. From Cloacher's point of view it was transparent

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enough; but how stupid the man had been, he had not apparently noticed that in getting the Board to agree to this, he had engendered in the minds of the Board a most touching and almost incredible faith in Mr. Pry's ability as a negotiator.

The whole stunt, when the Board could just have given him three months' notice and finished with him anyway, revealed either that the Board felt he was indispensable, or that they were conscience-stricken and would rather spend two thousand five hundred pounds of the Company's remaining money on a world tour on which he might somewhere get lost, than take the direct and obvious course of sacking him.

It was Pry's enthusiasm that defeated the scheme; in his programme, which he worked out with Cook's, he was foolish enough to show so much keenness to start at once that Cloacher grew suspicious, and turned against his own plan; he was not standing for any Cook's Tours for Mr. Pry.

Mr. Cloacher found a compromise: instead of going round the world, Mr. Pry should go round the United Kingdom. That would be equally effective in getting him away from the works and it would save the cost of voyages in ships. It could be arranged under cover of an even better proposal for developing the business. 'SUNSAF' should be exhibited at *every* agricultural show in the United Kingdom. Exhibit at every show . . . no stone unturned to develop Home trade . . . home trade . . . no stone unturned . . . every agricultural show. . . .

Pry shrugged his shoulders; presented Mr. Cloacher

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with a little book issued by the railway companies, in which over four hundred shows were listed for the year. Cloacher put on his glasses and thumbed it over: 'If we sell only ten tons at each show that will be four thousand tons a year . . .'

The Great Show Campaign was acclaimed by the Board as a master stroke of policy.

Pry's comments were deleted from his report. The minor detail that there was only Miss Theta and himself to attend the shows, and that three or four of them were always going on at once in different parts of the country was brushed aside. 'Is it your intention to run any of the shows yourself?' asked Pry. That was emphatically not Mr. Cloacher's intention. He would come and see what they were doing at some of them, as he was interested in events in the ring, but Mr. Pry and Miss Theta must make all the arrangements between them. More staff was all my eye. They could do a bit of work for their salaries, they had been slacking about long enough. . . .

Pry and Miss Theta talked it over. 'Join our travelling circus and see the world,' said Pry, raising one eyebrow and looking hard at her. They decided it had that attraction. 'Which parts of England would you like to see?'

'Grantham, I think,' said Miss Theta, 'and Truro.'

'Right, then we'll go there.'

They compiled a list, which included the 'Royal', the 'Highland', the 'Bath and West', the 'Great Yorkshire', and many lesser shows, but omitted those which were to be held in unpleasant localities. With

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small stands and with the lab boy to assist them, the programme was arranged to allow Pry to return to the works for one week in three to keep an eye on the home front. It was by no means all the shows, it was not a tenth of them, but when Cloacher saw the cost he was more than satisfied and agreed the programme *in toto*.

They got together a new show 'set', which they could assemble or pack up in something less than a couple of hours, and began at the 'Three Counties' at Stroud. They had some photographs taken of the stand before the newness of their exhibition outfit had worn off, and Cloacher showed them to the Board, who were very pleased. They went on from show to show, peacefully working through the programme. The shows were very, very tiring and had a great sameness, but sometimes the surrounding scenery was pleasant. Often it rained, and then they shivered in the stand in mackintoshes, drearily facing the deserted slush of the show avenues; but for the most of the time the slow drifting of people from stand to stand went on. Their voices grew metallic and their sales talk automatic. If, during the show, which usually lasted three or four days, they sold half a ton of 'SUNSAP', mostly in one or two gallon tins, they came to feel that they had done well.

But the 'SUNSAP' stand, with its queer tale about sugar from the air, its models and the old cow dissolving her skeleton, came to be looked for, and was very good publicity. One or two new agents took up the sale of 'SUNSAP' as a result of conversations on the stand, and

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it interested Universal Units. Ever since Pry had taken over from Mr. MacDuff he had been trying to get this Company interested. It was primarily a distributing organization; it had depots in every important agricultural centre in the British Isles; and, except that it manufactured those things on which it could not otherwise get its 'unit' profit, it was a free house. It sold anything that farmers would buy. Universal Units held out from the Coda and differed in function and policy from every other big company dealing in food and agricultural commodities. It did not manufacture or import its own particular brands or classes of feeding stuff and attempt to force the farmer to buy them in preference to others. They sold every class of feed; informed the farmers exactly what they were buying, shelved all responsibility, wasted no money in pushing one thing against another, and associated themselves with the opinions of the Ministry of Food and its research and advisory officers on every controversial issue. From every sale they took a unit profit, never more and never less than was necessary to expand their business by a unit amount each year, and to pay a regular twenty-five per cent dividend to their fortunate shareholders. They were regarded as outsiders — their practices immoral, and unorthodox — by every other firm in the trade, from the largest to the smallest, but they avoided competition, for the simple reason that they were selling the goods of those who might otherwise have competed with them.

Pry had tried very hard to get Universal Units to sell 'SUNSAP'; for their 'unit' profit was only about half

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what Graball & Co. were taking, and with them the stuff would be sold on its merits; and most important of all it would be *available* for every farmer to buy at their depots all over the country. Once it was stocked there, a campaign of shows and national advertising would be worth while. But Universal Units saw 'SUNSAP' as something experimental, and they did not waste time or money on experiments.

The appearance of 'SUNSAP' again and again at agricultural shows, where they themselves were exhibiting, led the Units people to believe that 'SUNSAP' had come to stay; that it was established. The reports which Pry had to show from research workers and official research stations constituted just sufficient evidence for them of its official recognition, and they liked the shape of the tins in which it was packed, it was a perfect 'unit' packing for small quantities. Universal Units took up the sale of 'SUNSAP', bought twenty tons in gallon and two-gallon tins, and distributed it amongst their depots. The Managing Director of their Proprietaries Unit was very friendly to Mr. Pry over the deal, gave him a cup of tea, on a hygienic table with tubular legs, and told him they were not taking up 'SUNSAP' because of his importunities, but because they saw it was one of those high-priced specialities for which a small demand had been created, and they ran dozens of such special 'lines'.

With this stroke of business to the credit of his great show campaign, Mr. Cloacher grew bold. He pulled off another coup. He told the Board that it was evidently necessary for him to take the whole

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'SUNSAP' business into his own hands, now that Mr. Pry was so often away on shows, and as the garden ornaments business could no longer receive the full personal attention he had given it in the past, it would be necessary to close down the garden ornaments business. With this the Board in the absence of Mr. Kosoff agreed in principle, but as the Company had been incorporated with the principal object of dealing in concrete constructions, and as they did not desire to focus any more attention on themselves, no one was to know that the bird-bath business was closed down. All orders for concrete articles that could not be made by two workmen were to be tactfully refused; and when there were no orders the two men were to be kept occupied in casting small concrete articles and breaking them up again. By using the carefully broken concrete of these articles as rubble for making more, the process would continue for a long time with a negligible expenditure on materials.

Of this profound change in the Company's organization and activities Pry was told nothing, and during the weeks that he was at the works he saw nothing either. All the letters concerning 'SUNSAP', except those with Messrs. Graball — which had become of too personal a nature for him to see — were left for him to answer. The peculiar spell of scientific mystery and danger that he had cast over the 'SUNSAP' plant still kept Cloacher out of it; things went on exactly as before. Only the two men breaking up concrete disturbed the atmosphere of abandonment and ruin in the bird-bath bay; the girl who was supposed to do his letters had

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left; but for the rest, Mrs. Block was still attending to the welfare and salvation of the two men, the girl at the telephone, the dissipated-looking young accountant, Mr. Cloacher's chauffeur and Mr. Cloacher himself.

Pry had no longer any knowledge of the rate at which the money was running out, and he was scarcely conscious that it was doing so; a number of small windfalls by way of orders for 'SUNSAP' maintained a sense that the business was alive, and with their help they were keeping going much longer than he had expected. They were already well into another year, and there seemed no reason why they should not limp along at this rate indefinitely. The order from the Universal Units Co. was the only considerable one which came from the shows; others amounting to many times its value were attributable to the recommendations of research workers in different parts of the world.

Once, when Pry came back after an awful and completely wasted fortnight at the British Industries Fair, he found something at the works which was really intriguing. On the Company's notepaper the address of the Registered Office at Agastral House had been blocked out with a rubber stamp, and the address of the East Bullock Works was substituted. Brig.-General Sunderland Thump's name, as Secretary, was also deleted, and that of Joshua Leary appeared in its place. General Thump had been dismissed and the London offices closed down.

With a certain rueful satisfaction Pry reflected that the Board were at last doing one by one all the things that he had recommended in his fatal report, swallow-

## ON WITH THE SHOW

ing all the unpleasant pills now that it was too late for them to do the least good.

With the passing of General Thump, Mr. Cloacher's powers were practically absolute; he wore a wing collar every day, and permitted no one to disturb him as he sat in his office pretending to read *The Times*. He imported a very large coloured photograph of himself in full Masonic robes, which he hung on his wall in front of him. He also had the twenty-point electric candelabrum from the old Board Room at Agastral House and hung it above him. It was somewhat disproportionate to the size of his office, but it gave it a great air of splendour. Mr. Cloacher was no longer to be approached directly; Mrs. Block, his private and confidential secretary, intercepted all inquiries, she sat for part of her time at a desk immediately outside his door, and fumbled with a typewriter, or reading her *War Cry*, and at eleven in the morning and four in the afternoon, she made for him not tea, but bowls of delicious soup.

It was shortly after this that Mr. Cloacher's carbuncle — or tumour, or whatever it was — burst. It had been festering for some time and at last surgical treatment could no longer be deferred. It had to be removed.

With Mr. Cloacher in hospital, a bright ray of hope entered Pry's mind. Anxiously he inquired from day to day about him from Mrs. Block, who was gratified that when sickness overtook her hero, even Mr. Pry showed concern. What a prince amongst men was Mr. Cloacher that even his enemies . . .

## SUGAR IN THE AIR

But Mr. Cloacher did not die; in six weeks he was back again, his head turbaned with bandages, and his skin hanging loose on him, the fat beneath it drained mysteriously away. He was very shaky, and the Board, full of human kindness, absolved him from doing anything at all about the business. He sat in his office, under the gilded candelabrum, receiving messages of sympathy and drinking Benger's Food.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THIS SITE FOR SALE

IT was April again, and still the Company survived. There had been some Royal occasion, a public holiday, with flags flying from the housetops across the river, and the ominous booming of guns from the direction of the Tower. The works were closed and Pry had taken home a part of some new exhibit for the shows. He had worked at it all day in the garden behind Snoot House, delighting in the sound of hammering and sawing, the strange litany that, out on the marshes, no one save himself and Mary and their own child heard; his gesture of affirmation that come what may the creative and constructional work of mankind must and should go on. His own work had been whittled down until only the exhibition of 'SUNSAP' at shows was left that he was permitted to do, but with that little he would continue, and the thing that he was making was for him something more than a mere advertising device. It was an appeal, an indirect petition to others, to take up the real work where it had been stopped, to use the discoveries and go on, somebody, somewhere, with the winning of food from the air. The very joints in the woodwork, trim and well made, held inherent within them that appeal. And as Pry worked, Michael played with the shavings and ran about with the nails.

Pry had taken his handiwork back to the factory

## SUGAR IN THE AIR

the next day, and was working on it with a signwriter, when Cloacher asked him to step into his office. The Board, whilst they were still able to file a petition of solvency, had decided to put the Company into voluntary liquidation. The arrangements for all future shows were to be cancelled, and within a day or two Pry would receive notice terminating his employment. The patents, processes, buildings and machinery would be put up for sale.

'SUNSAP' was not a commercial success, the Board had been misled, but he, Mr. Cloacher, would say nothing about that, he desired only to arrange everything as comfortably as possible for everybody concerned, he had not forgotten that Mr. Pry had a family and he had made a suggestion to the Chairman. The Board had been unable to sell the business and now placed practically no value on it: if Mr. Pry could raise the money amongst his friends, he could have the patents and processes and all that was movable of the plant for twenty thousand pounds. The Chairman had agreed with him that after all Mr. Pry had done, he should be given this opportunity of having the business for his own.

Pry returned thoughtfully to his own office. The end of the Bullock Works, of his job, and of the Company had so long been inevitable that its coming scarcely disturbed him. He was already thinking only of this new development. It was quite true that the business, if it could be sold at all, would not fetch much. The Board had tried to sell it a dozen times without success, they would be glad enough now to

## THIS SITE FOR SALE

sell for twenty thousand pounds — a business that according to the accounts had never shown a profit. Only he knew the facts; the Board had in effect de-valued their own business; what a golden opportunity! Could he somehow raise fifty or sixty thousand pounds? With that capital it would just be possible to buy the processes and plant and start up again, and the business would be profitable. It would unquestionably pay a comfortable dividend on that small capital. It was an 'attractive proposition'. Events had played into his hands.

But from whom could he raise fifty thousand pounds, a trifling sum as Company finance goes, but inaccessible to him as the mountains of the moon. Another man, he thought, in his place, would find a way to do it, why not he? But in his life he had made no attempt to move amongst 'people who had money'; such chances as there had been he had passed over with a sneer. He had no friends in the City. Men like Klamac or Kosoff could go to a new country, knowing nobody, ignorant even of a word of the language, and in six months have a great Company floated for any fantastic project; but he, with an option to purchase a real business, with dazzling possibilities for development, for something less than a twentieth of its value, saw no way to raise a thousand, let alone fifty thousand pounds.

Within three days Pry received his notice from the Chairman, with a personal letter expressing regret that 'a speculative business had failed', and wishing him every success in the future.

## SUGAR IN THE AIR

Although the resolution to put the Company into voluntary liquidation had yet to be passed by the Company's shareholders, Mr. Cloacher at once began to sell the office furniture. Nothing else, only the office furniture — they would be there for another three months at least — but as Mr. Cloacher said, it was something done. Dr. Zaareb, forfeiting the fees to which he was entitled, broke away at once and did not go to East Bullock again. Miss Theta and the young chemist were dismissed after a month's notice, only two men remained on the 'SUNSAP' plant. And still Pry saw no way to raise fifty thousand pounds, he saw his chance slipping away from him, everything going to pieces under his eyes, and still he could do nothing. He worked out proposals, prepared his dossier of balance sheets, estimates, costs, past sales and the history of the business, but knew no one to approach who could put up the money to save 'Food from the Air'.

He went to Jimmy Cleggan, but in Ireland the pitch had been queered. He wrote out of the blue to rich men who were known as sponsors of new enterprise; he approached his old employers, and members of his professional association — all in vain.

But at last, through a merchant to whom he had sold 'SUNSAP' in the past, he heard of a manufacturing firm in the North, who were anxious to acquire a new business. He went to Leeds with his papers, and the two partners of the firm examined his proposals exhaustively. It seemed that the business could certainly be made to pay; they had the necessary

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capital, and the space in their works; the gases could be drawn, for a start, from their own power house chimney. Pry told them of his option, and at last persuaded them to make an offer. They did so, on Pry's undertaking to go to Leeds and run the business for them, for a very small salary and a share in the profits. Pry's confidence in himself was restored. He had not failed to find a way. The Leeds firm formally offered the sum asked: twenty thousand pounds.

The offer was refused. Mr. Cloacher persuaded the Board that if the Leeds firm were willing to pay twenty thousand pounds, there must be other firms who would pay twice as much. There was nothing in writing about any option, and he would not have the business sold at such a price merely to favour Mr. Pry, who in getting this offer was obviously only out to find himself another cushy job. The offer was turned down without discussion.

Pry gave up the game, and resigned himself to watching the course of events, for of one thing he was certain, the Company would expire as it had lived, nothing could possibly go straight. He wrote to the Chairman, suggesting that the business should be offered to the Universal Units Co. It was a long shot, but in a world of inconsequence it might come off, and if it did, it would at least prevent the processes being picked up for a song at the last by the Coda, merely that they might be suppressed and 'SUNSAP' kept off the market; for that, Pry saw, was its most probable destiny. Monopoly's sink of oblivion.

## SUGAR IN THE AIR

The first kink in the final zigzag occurred at the Extraordinary General Meeting which the Directors called to pass the resolution to put the Company into liquidation. The Directors, by a characteristic oversight, neglected to provide the shareholders with any statement of the Company's affairs on which to base their not unimportant decision. The shareholders, at last infuriated into resistance, refused to discuss the matter until the facts were put before them, and the meeting ended with shouts and the brandishing of sticks and umbrellas.

The Company continued in corporate existence. 'The Milk White Hind', said Dr. Zaareb, to whom Pry was still reporting his experiences in the Never-never Lands, 'Aye doomed to death but fated not to die'. At the works, with the two men, Pry continued to execute orders for 'SUNSAP' from the remaining stocks, and two weeks before his notice was due to expire an order for a hundred and fifty tons of 'SUNSAP' in one shipment came from the U.S.A.

'What do you propose to do about it?' Pry asked Cloacher. 'Refuse it, or start up the plant again?'

Mr. Cloacher felt that fifteen hundred odd pounds would be useful; of course they would accept the order; the plant had been kept in proper working order, hadn't it?

'Right!' said Pry. He did not mention that unless some arrangement were made with him he would be leaving before the job was half done. That was for Mr. Cloacher to remember. Nor did he mention that no complete working account of the whole manufacturing

## THIS SITE FOR SALE

process was in existence, save in his mind. He had never been asked to write it down, and he had no intention of doing so, until he *was* asked. All the working formulae were there, confused in stacks of research records, mostly of unsuccessful experiments, from which no one but himself could possibly sort them out. The patent specifications, too, with their alternative claims, would be gloriously misleading.

Plummox and the original maintenance fitter, who had been out of work for something over two years, and kept by the beneficent State in a condition of impoverished docility on the dole, pared down below subsistence level by the Means Test, were glad enough of Pry's invitation to return and help work the plant. Pry insisted that this time he should have skilled men. Once more the gases from the power station were diverted from the air, and once more the cascades of Zaareb's blue catalyst were bombarded by the energy of the sun. And once again the synthetic sugar was run from the evaporators into the waiting barrels. It was good to leave the plant as it had once been, in the activity of full production. And on the day his notice expired, Pry, reminding nobody that he was going, put his few remaining personal belongings into an attaché case and went home at half-past five.

On the following day he stayed at home; and on the day after that also; wondering when Mr. Cloacher and the Board would remember that they had dismissed him, and not a little curious to know what they would do about it. On the third day Mrs. Block appeared at Snoot House, in her full Salvation Army uniform,

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bearing a letter from Mr. Cloacher. Peering past Pry down the passage and hoping that she might be invited in, Mrs. Block warned Pry for his own good that Mr. Cloacher was furious with him for absenting himself without leave in the middle of an important order, and advised him to come back to the works at once. Pry laughed and showed her to the gate, which he closed carefully behind her.

Mr. Cloacher's letter said that he was authorized by the Board to inform Mr. Pry that if he would care to remain with the Company for one month longer they were prepared to allow him to do so. He, Mr. Cloacher, had arranged this with the Board, feeling that if Mr. Pry had not obtained other employment the money might help to tide him over a difficult period.

The sheer cheek of this way of asking a favour somewhat curbed Pry's indignation; but he would not stomach it, he really would stay away and leave them in mid-air.

'That cuts both ways,' said Mary, '... and what about the balance of your five hundred pounds?'

'All right,' said Pry, 'I'll go back. But this time on *my* terms: the month's salary to be paid in advance. Three weeks' holiday with full pay when the U.S.A. job is finished, and a cheque for the outstanding two hundred pounds they owe me, before I set foot in the works again.'

'You'll never pull that off.'

'We shall see.'

Pry did pull it off; he got all that he asked for, without the least resistance; first, because the Chairman

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had never had any intention of allowing Mr. Pry to be defrauded of his two hundred pounds; and secondly because it suited Mr. Cloacher very well that the despicable Mr. Pry should thus hold up the Board; in paying Mr. Pry it was only to be expected that they should pay Mr. Cloacher at the same time and on the same terms, and his share was much greater than Mr. Pry's.

Pry went to the bank with his cheque for two hundred pounds. At last he had got the whole of his promised five hundred. Earned over and over again, extracted bit by bit, and so grimly fought for; he had got his ticket-of-leave, his Liberty Bond. The price of two years' emancipation from Industrialism was secure at the bank. He had lost his 'Food from the Air', but he had won his freedom—for two brief years.

The manufacture of 'SUNSAP' went on. The hundred and fifty tons were made and shipped to America, and Pry took his holiday, camping with Mary and Michael, by the abandoned silver mine in Little Sark. In that paradise of the sea, rambling in caves glorious with the amber and purple of the algae, scrambling over wild rocks set with sea pools and dashed with spray, Pry found access to a motif, to a strength within his life, firm and unwavering through the ambition and frustrations of his past few years. He returned to the works, young and glowing and physically well, no longer slow and tired, and already he believed himself dissevered in spirit from all that his work had meant to him. To make food from the air, it had been a farce, an episode in his life; a joyous escapade.

No, he would stay on, from month to month, from

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week to week, for he knew that they would need him until the end. He knew, sure as he had laughed at the rising sun from his tent on Little Sark, that the synthetic sugar would still be made: the work that Zaareb and he had done, rooted as it was in the future's needs, held within it a potentiality of development that no folly could restrain. What was done was done, discoveries cannot be unmade; he had sought to hold them to himself, and from that had arisen half the anguish that he had suffered. 'Let go,' he said. 'I have but to let go, and all is well.' He saw his duty before him, fully, completely and clearly. To whomsoever bought the processes, were it even the Coda, he must disclose every detail, every tentative hypothesis that could guide further work, everything he knew. Not to oblige the trumpery, squabbling, shiftless and ridiculous Directors of the Company, or to serve the ends of the equally trumpery gang who would buy the rights of exploitation or suppression from them; but to serve the human community, perhaps a real community in the future, which contained all that was creative within himself, and more, infinitely more than he would ever imagine or know; the little that he had done should go into the common stock, and with that decision Pry became something more than the breadwinner of Snoot House, or the feeble and idiosyncratic poet of action, whose trochees were machines and whose iambics were reactions in chemistry.

'Then,' said Mary, 'you had better write down the processes at once, while that mood is on you, in a week you'll be involved again.'

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Pry began the account. It was very detailed and very long; and when the mood of renunciation had passed, as in a week it certainly had, it was very hard to give away every thought, every lead by which he had hoped to proceed from the synthesis of simple sugars to starch and the proteins. But he put it all down, anticipating the difficulties of his successors, and making things as clear and straightforward as he could for them.

The Company dragged on. The resolution to wind up was defeated at the adjourned meeting of the shareholders. Kosoff and Klamac joined forces at last and canvassed the angry shareholders for their proxies: for power to vote on their behalf. From the City and from every part of the country the proxies came. And the proxies fell upon the Board. It was the Kosoff-Klamac *bloc*.

So the Company dragged on, and with the irony always lurking in circumstances, many orders for 'SUNSAP' were received; Pry, who was now chemist and works foreman, typist, clerk and sales manager, was kept feverishly busy. Often he did not know whether he was employed by the Company or not, for when one month had run out, no one bothered to inform him whether he was required for another. The Directors, defeated in their desire to wind up the Company, turned to a highly ingenious deviation of policy: although they could not wind up the Company, save with the consent of its members, they could sell all its assets. With the works, and the processes, and the plant sold, the substance of the Company would

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have disappeared; there would be nothing *to* wind up, except a name registered in a book. It was a slow but certain process, and it was unique. Unique in the sense that it was the only policy in the whole history of the Company that the Board had embarked on, of their own initiative, and in time. When it started there was sufficient money to pay off the creditors, and no one could spoil the process by a sudden petition in bankruptcy. There was, of course, a nominal compounding with the creditors, which at once destroyed the Company's credit, but with the Company stripped bare of everything except the Bullock works, and with Mr. Cloacher its sole surviving encumbrance, the sales of 'SUNSAP' paid the way from month to month on a strictly cash basis. The business had become a paying concern; for a few brief months before its end it flickered into profitable life.

The Coda hovered nearer its prey: deputations were for everlastingly going round the works, investigating, picking up what information they could, on the pretence that they were going to buy the business. But it was Universal Units who bought it in the end, bought it outright, plant, processes, patents, stock, goodwill and all, and with so little fuss that Pry scarcely realized it was sold.

In the research, in the endeavour to synthesize other food, they had no interest at all, and therefore they would not need the services of Mr. Pry, that would be their first economy. They had investigated 'SUNSAP' as a proprietary sales 'line', and reaching the conclusion that they could manufacture and sell it at their stipu-

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lated 'unit' profit, and that the return from capital invested would be above the yellow line on their charts, the purchase of the business and the starting up of manufacture at their own works, was for them an inevitable and logical action. So they made the purchase. They had need of a good pig and cattle spice with some nutritive value, and now that a demand had been created for it, 'SUNSAP', which was now sufficiently recognized and approved by the Ministry of Food, would do as well as any. Much money, they considered, had been wasted on advertising 'SUNSAP' as 'Food from the Air'; the purchaser was not concerned in how the stuff was made. In future it would be simply 'SUNSAP' Pig and Cattle Spice, with stated sugar content. And the main thing was to ensure that they made it exactly as it had been made before, there must be no waste of money in trying variations. The plant must be put down once and for all, to run smoothly for all time, with unskilled labour and the minimum of expensive scientific control. It must run year in and year out; making the one saleable product, 'SUNSAP'. Always exactly the same, and as it had been before. When the returns reached above the purple line on their administration charts, a duplicate manufacturing unit would be added; if the returns sank below the red line, and remained below it for the prescribed time, the plant would be shut down and another, more profitable, sales 'line' would be substituted.

Universal Units' engineers came, and with pains-taking thoroughness measured every detail of the plant,

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so that when it was transferred to Unithaven, the parts would be bolted down on the new concrete in exactly the same relative positions that they had occupied before. Every improvisation, every bit of gear rigged up provisionally to 'make do', was also accurately measured for exact reproduction and reinstallation.

Pry remained at the works, explaining what things were for, helping to hold the tape, advising on the dismantling. He had no quarrel with Universal Units or their engineers.

Two draughtsmen went up the side of the power station chimney in a cradle, to determine the exact size of hole to be cut in the chimney at Unithaven, and the method of fixing the main. Pry, down on the ground, with one of their assistant engineers, threw away his cigarette and suddenly burst out laughing.

'What is it that amuses you?' the engineer demanded, touchy about what might be a criticism of his way of tackling his job.

'Nothing,' said Pry. 'Nothing, except that it makes so perfect a picture: "The Adoration of the *Status Quo*".'

When the blue prints had all been prepared, a company of young chemists, engineers and clerks came down from Unithaven to take over what had been bought. For them it was an expedition and a great lark. Pry moved amongst them, laughing and cavalierly throwing things into their hands, but his eyes were grave and sad, and sometimes, as when the old experimental gear was broken up, he had to stroll away, into the privacy of his office, for he was unable to restrain a welling up of tears.

## THIS SITE FOR SALE

On the last day he handed to the Managing Director of the Universal Units Company his written description of the processes, the document that disclosed not the method of making 'SUNSAP' only, but the results of all their other research and every idea he had for advancing from that to all that was to have been his 'Food from the Air'. He retained no copy, as he might very well have done.

'If I may say so,' said their Managing Director, 'you take this very coolly; what are you going to do, now that we have bought the business. . . ?'

'Who cares?' said Pry. 'Had it occurred to *you* to care?'

The smoking, mobile cranes, ferreting amongst the plant, lifted the mains and the pieces of machinery from their settings, ran back with them, and placed them on the lorries; which went off with their loads, through the Essex lanes and across England to the grimmer purlieu of Unithaven. It was great fun at the end, when the last loads were ready to go, and the invaders began to strip the office and the laboratory.

'We don't take dirty bottles,' they said, and they threw the samples of new experimental products down the sink. And everyone became hilarious over the jar of Sodium Metal. It was useful in analysis, but quite cheap, and too dangerous to take with them to Unithaven. They threw it, in lumps, into some water remaining in one of the broken tanks. It exploded with flashes of yellow light and filled the barren and empty works with choking clouds of smoke.



# A List of Novels

arranged under authors' names, and  
chosen from the fiction published by  
Jonathan Cape

BATES, H. E.

**THE TWO SISTERS**

'Jenny, Jessie and Michael, figures of eternal youth, shown with all their tumultuous passionate emotions, in a beautiful mirror.'

EDWARD GARNETT

**CATHERINE FOSTER**

The story of a woman whose love is drawn towards her husband's brother, told with consummate artistry.

**CHARLOTTE'S ROW**

'What strikes one most of all about this book is its extraordinary sense of beauty. There is not a false note in the novel.'

*Manchester Guardian*

**THE FALLOW LAND**

The story of an English farm and those who farmed it between the 'eighties and to-day.

**THE POACHER**

A picture and a tragedy of English rural life. The life story of a poacher.

**A HOUSE OF WOMEN**

The turbulent story of Rosie Perkins, country barmaid and farmer's wife.

BATES, RALPH

**THE OLIVE FIELD**

A long and exciting story of the Spanish Revolution - 1932-3.

BROPHY, JOHN

**WATERFRONT**

Liverpool life, work in a big department store, the skeleton in a respectable family cupboard.

**THE WORLD WENT MAD**

A cross-section of English life during the Great War; a living sequence of brief cinematographic scenes.

**I LET HIM GO**

A sensitive young man is confronted, in exceptional circumstances, with his wife's murderer. What will be his emotions? What action will he take?

**THE RAMPARTS OF VIRTUE**

The tale of Oliver Antrobus, journalist: his love affair and his Nazi son Franz.

## CALDER-MARSHALL, ARTHUR

### TWO OF A KIND

Two love-affairs, a father's and a daughter's; twenty-five years apart in time, but of equal significance.

### ABOUT LEVY

'I urge all those who are interested in the craft of fiction to read this very successful experiment.' HAROLD NICOLSON

### AT SEA

The ordeal of a honeymoon couple carried out to sea in a small boat.

### DEAD CENTRE

*Dead Centre* is an admirable novel presenting that little world within a world which is the modern small public school by the simple method of looking at it from some sixty different angles—boys, masters, matron, porter, and so on.

### PIE IN THE SKY

A novel on a broad canvas: the conflict of class, of family ties, of different generations, and the forces of political consciousness.

## CAMBRIDGE, ELIZABETH

### HOSTAGES TO FORTUNE

A quiet, charming picture of a country doctor's family. (*Chosen by the Book Society*.)

### THE Sycamore Tree

The story of a man who 'wished to give no trouble', and what happened to his marriage.

### SUSAN AND JOANNA

The parallel lives of two girls in a downland country of the Midlands.

### THE TWO DOCTORS

Tells how the young Doctor John Anselm was received by the country people of Bradnell, and by the older practitioner, Doctor Murchie.

## CANFIELD, DOROTHY

### THE BRIMMING CUP

Conflict in a woman's heart between domesticity and passion.

### HER SON'S WIFE

A mother's struggle against her son's selfishness, and her daughter-in-law's self-indulgence.

### THE DEEPENING STREAM

'Her portrait of a young American woman grows into life by a quiet emphasis, and enlarges into a sure picture of American life.'

*Manchester Guardian*

### BASQUE PEOPLE

A collection of stories about men and women of the Basque country.

### BONFIRE

A young doctor in a small American town, the story of his conflict with his self-sacrificing sister and of his disastrous marriage.

DAY LEWIS, C.

THE FRIENDLY TREE

A beautifully written love-story by the famous young poet.

FRASER, RONALD

FLOWER PHANTOMS

A strange tale of a girl's merging into the body and experience of a plant.

THE VISTA

The spiritual pilgrimage of a man through a disastrous marriage, to happiness with the woman he loves.

ROSE ANSTEY

The story of a woman's heart. 'The sustained beauty of the prose is the just expression of beauty in the conception.' *Observer*

THE FLYING DRAPER

The interaction between two worlds made tangible by the flying draper of Primrose Hill.

MARRIAGE IN HEAVEN

In the love of man for woman, there lives an 'immortal kind of reality': the story of Adrian and Linet.

TROPICAL WATERS

An exciting and amusing story of love and adventure in South America.

THE NINTH OF JULY

A story of romantic love and jealousy in the glamorous setting of South America.

SURPRISING RESULTS

A tragi-comedy in which the comedy predominates, staged in a Mediterranean setting.

GLASGOW, ELLEN

VEIN OF IRON

The clash of old and new ideas in an American family bound together only by the 'Vein of Iron'.

GOODWIN, GERAINT

THE HEYDAY IN THE BLOOD

A novel of the Welsh earth and the Welsh people who work on the earth.

GREENWOOD, WALTER

LOVE ON THE DOLE

A novel of life among the unemployed in Salford and Manchester. 'We passionately desire this novel to be read: it is the real thing.'

*Manchester Guardian*

HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR

A racy satire on municipal politics in a provincial city.

STANDING ROOM ONLY

An amusing and vivid picture of back-stage life in the provinces.

HEMINGWAY, ERNEST

FIESTA

A relentless picture of the post-war American expatriates in Montparnasse. (U.S.A. Title: *The Sun also Rises*.)

## HEMINGWAY, ERNEST—*continued*

### A FAREWELL TO ARMS

Americans on the Italian front, and the poignancy of a personal drama staged against the war background.

### TORRENTS OF SPRING

A brilliant pastiche of certain modern novels, written with the author's richest gusto.

## HOPKINS STANLEY

### THE LADIES

The story of Captain Flood and his five daughters; their lives and tragedies in a small Southern town in America.

### SIXTH OF JUNE

The lives and thoughts of a Virginian family, brought together by the 'Sixth of June' holiday.

## HURST, FANNIE

### LUMMOX

The life-story of Bertha, maid-of-all-work.

### A PRESIDENT IS BORN

The early life of a man destined to be President of the United States.

### FIVE AND TEN

The 'thirteenth richest man in the world', and the strange characters surrounding him.

### BACK STREET

The life of a woman who lives in the 'back street' of a rich protector's life.

### ANITRA'S DANCE

The story of Bruno, genius and composer, and of his bohemian household in New York.

## KASTNER, ERICH

### THE MISSING MINIATURE

A humorous crime novel by the author of *Emil and the Detectives* and *Three Men in the Snow*.

## LEWIS, SINCLAIR

### MARTIN ARROWSMITH

The fight of a doctor against shams and hypocrisies in medical science.

### THE TRAIL OF THE HAWK

The pioneer days of flying and a man's search for a career.

### OUR MR. WRENN

A meek little man's astonishing adventures in England.

### BABBITT

The book that gave a new word to the language. 'One of the greatest novels I have read for a long time.' H. G. WELLS

### MAIN STREET

The soul of small-town America. 'A most searching and excellent piece of work.' JOHN GALSWORTHY

## LEWIS, SINCLAIR—*continued*

### THE JOB

The story of one of the army of girls who travel on the New York Elevated every day.

### MANTRAP

Two men and a woman brought together in the Canadian North-West.

### ELMER GANTRY

The portrait of a profligate revivalist and his ecclesiastical 'racket'.

### THE MAN WHO KNEW COOLIDGE

A satirical portrait in the raciest American style, and a delectable pendant to *Babbitt*.

### DODSWORTH

An elderly American business man and his wife in England and Europe. 'A truly first-rate story.' ARNOLD BENNETT

### FREE AIR

A garage-mechanic chases a pretty girl in a Rolls-Royce. A two-thousand-mile romance.

### ANN VICKERS

An indictment of modern American social conditions, a plea for penal reform, and the portrait of a remarkable woman.

### WORK OF ART

The American counterpart of Arnold Bennett's *Imperial Palace*: the life story of an hotel-keeper.

### IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE

Tells how in 1936 a President of the U.S.A. made himself dictator, and what were the effects of a Fascist regime in democratic America.

## LINKLATER, ERIC

### WHITE-MAA'S SAGA

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